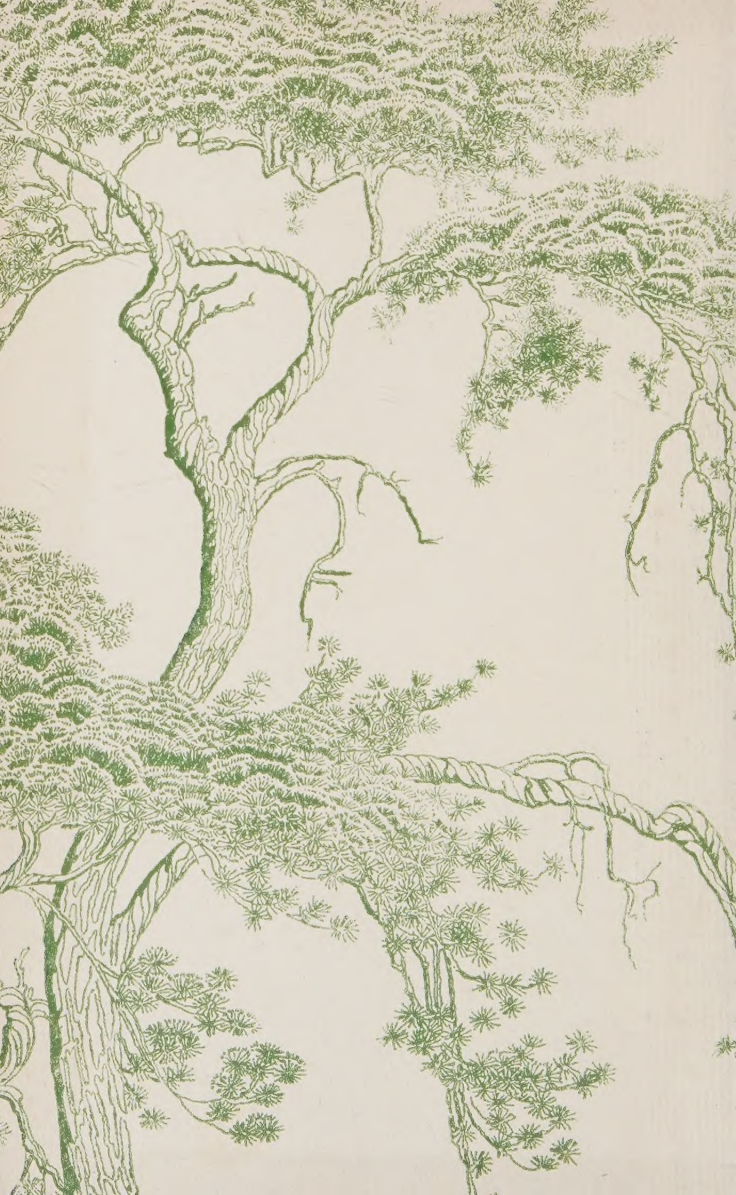

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THE HOUSE OF BALTAZAR

by

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THE HOUSE OF BALTAZAR

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CHAPTER I

THE early story of Baltazar is not the easiest one to tell. It is episodic. It obeys not the Unities of Time, Place and Action. The only unity to be found in it is the oneness of character in that absurd and accomplished man. The fact of his being lustily alive at the present moment does not matter. To get him in perspective, one must regard him as belonging to the past. Now the past is a relative conception. Save to the academic student of History, Charlemagne is as remote as Sesostris. To the world emerging from the stupor of the Great War, Mons is as distant as Balaclava. Time is really reckoned by the heart-throbs of individuals or nations. Yester-year is infinitely far away. . . .

To get back to Baltazar and his story. In the first place it may be said that he was a man of fits and starts ; a description which does not imply irresponsible mobility of purpose and spasmodic achievement. The phrase must be taken in the literal significance of the two terms. A man of fits—of mental, moral and emotional paroxysms ; of starts—of swift courses of action which these paroxysms irresistibly determined.

Which same causes of action, in each case, he doggedly and ruthlessly pursued. One, an intimate teacher of Baltazar, one who, possessed of the knowledge of the scholar and the wisdom of the man of the world, might be qualified to judge, called him a Fool of Genius. Now the genius is steadfast; the fool erratic. In this apparent irreconcilability of attributes lies the difficulty of presenting the story of Baltazar.

But for the war, the story would scarcely be worth the telling, however interesting might be his sheer personality and his calculated waywardness. It would have led no whither, save to a stage or two further on his journey to the grave. But there is scarcely a human being alive with whose apparently predestined lot the war has not played the very devil. It knocked Baltazar's world to bits—as soon as the realization of it burst on his astonished senses; yet it seemed to bring finality or continuity into his hitherto disconnected life.

It was during the war that his name was mentioned and his character discussed for the first time for many years, by two persons not without interest in his fate.

Marcelle Baring, a professional nurse of long standing, arrived late one night at Churton Towers, to take up the duties of sister in charge. The place was the country seat of a great family who, like many others, had given it over to the Government as a convalescent home for officers; a place of stately lawns and terraces and fountains; of picture-hung galleries guarded by grim emptinesses in armour; of noble halls heterogeneously furnished—for generosity seldom goes so far as to leave the edges of a priceless marquetry table at the mercy of a feather-headed subaltern's forgotten cigarette; of tapestried rooms,

once filled with the treasures of centuries, now empty save for the rows of little standard War Office bedsteads and the little deal regulation tables at their heads.

Somewhat confused by the vastness of her new home, and by the contrast of its gracious splendour with the utilitarian ugliness and mathematical uniformity of the General Hospital which she had just left, Marcelle Baring went downstairs the next morning to begin her new duties. Once in the wards she felt at home ; for a ward of sick men is the same all the world over. The Matron went round with her, performing introductions ; but that first morning she only caught a third of the names. It would take a few days to learn them, to learn also the history of the cases. Besides, they were convalescents, dressings were few, and her work was more administrative than personal. Her first impression was that of a high-spirited crowd of almost indistinguishable young men, some to all intents and purposes sound of wind and limb, who in a short time would be sent back to the tempest of shell whence they were driven ; others maimed and crippled, armless, legless, with drooping wrists, with unserving ankles. In the daytime nearly all were out of the wards ; most in the open air playing tennis or lounging about the terraces, or playing billiards in the open-sided pavilion that looked over the Japanese garden. It was no easy matter to keep track of them all.

It was only on the second day that the name of a young officer who had lost his foot caught her eye : " Mr. G. Baltazar." He was very young, fair, blue-eyed, with a little blond moustache. His tunic, laid ready with the rest of his clothes, bore the white and purple ribbon of the Military Cross. The stump had practically healed, but it still needed attention.

" It's rotten luck, isn't it, Sister ? " he said while

she was tending him. "I thought I had got through all right—the show at Ypres early in June. I all but saw it out, but a bit of high explosive got me and here I am. Anyhow, they say they're going to wangle me an artificial foot, so that I'll never know the difference. One of those pukka things, you know, that'll pick up pins with the toes. I hope it'll come soon, for I'm fed up with crutches. I always feel as if I ought to hold out my hat for pennies."

"Poor chap!" said Marcelle absently.

"That's kind of you, but it's just what I'm hating. I don't want to go through life as a 'poor chap.'" He paused, then ran on: "I wonder how you dear people can look at the beastly thing. Whenever I cock my leg down and try to have a sight of it, it nearly makes me sick. I like to be neat and tidy and not repulsive to my fellow-creatures, but that crimpled-crumpled end of me is just slovenly and disgusting."

Marcelle Baring scarcely heeded his debonair talk. His name had awakened far-off memories. She worked in silence, pinned the bandage and, smiling, with a "You'll do all right, Mr. Baltazar," left him.

The shock came the next afternoon. As she passed through the great entrance hall, fitted up as a lounge with the heterogeneous furniture, she came across him, the solitary occupant, sitting at a table, busy with pencil and writing-pad and a thick volume propped up in front of him. Her eye caught arresting symbols on the paper, then the page-heading of the book: "Rigid Dynamics."

She paused. He looked up with a laugh.

"Hello, Sister!"

She said, with a catch in her breath, "You're a mathematician?"

He laughed. "More or less. If they kick me out

of the Army, I must go back to Cambridge and begin again where I left off."

"You must have left off rather high, if you're reading Rigid."

He started, for no one in this wide world but a mathematical student could have used the phrase.

"What the—what do you know about Rigid?"

"I was at Newnham, in my young days," she replied, "and I read mathematics. And, oddly enough, my private tutor was"—she hesitated for a second—"some one of your name."

He pushed his chair away from the table.

"That must have been my father."

"John Baltazar."

"Yes, John Baltazar. One of the greatest mathematical geniuses Cambridge has produced. Good Lord! did you know my father?"

"He and I were great friends."

She looked him through and through with curiously burning eyes; of which the boy was unconscious, for he said:

"Fancy your reading with my father! It's a funny old world." Then suddenly he reflected and glanced at her critically. "But how could you? He disappeared nearly twenty years ago."

"I'm thirty-eight," she said.

"Lord! you don't look it—nothing like it," he cried boyishly.

Nor did she. She carried a graceful air of youth, from the wave of brown hair that escaped from beneath her Sister's cap to the supple and delicately curved figure. And her face, if you peered not too closely, was young, very pure in feature, still with a bloom on the complexion in spite of confinement in hospital wards. Her voice, too, was soft and youthful. Per-

haps her eyes were a little weary—they had seen many terrible things.

At the young man's tribute she flushed slightly and smiled. But the smile died away when he added :

"What was he like ? I've often wondered, and there has been no one to tell me—no one I could have listened to. The dons of his generation are too shy to refer to him, and I'm too shy to ask 'em. Do you know I've never seen a picture of him even."

"He was not unlike you," she replied, looking not at him, but wistfully down the years. "Of heavier build. He was a man of tremendous vitality—and swift brain. The most marvellous teacher I have ever met. He seemed to hold your intellect in his hands like a physical thing, sweep it clear of cobwebs and compel it to assimilate whatever he chose. A born teacher and a wonderful man."

"But was he human ? I know his work, though I haven't read enough to tackle it yet—most of it's away and beyond Part II of the Tripos even. I went up with an Open Mathematical Scholarship just before the war, and only did my first year's reading. I'm beginning this "—he tapped his Treatise on Rigid Dynamics—"on my own. What I mean is," he went on, after a pause, "my father has been always an abstraction to me. I shouldn't have worried about him if he had just been a nonentity—it wasn't playing the game to vanish as he did into space and leave my mother to fend for herself."

"But I heard," said the Sister, "that your mother had her own private fortune."

"I wasn't alluding to that side of it," he admitted. "But he did vanish, didn't he ? Well, as I say, if he had been just a nobody, I shouldn't have been particularly interested ; but he wasn't. He was the most

brilliant man of his generation at Cambridge. For instance, he took up Chinese as a sort of relaxation. They say his is the only really scientific handbook on the study of the language. You see, Sister"—he swerved impatiently on his chair and brought his hand down on the table, whereat she drew a swift inward breath, for the gesture of the son was that of the father—"I've always wanted to know whether I'm the son of an inhuman intellect or of a man of flesh and blood. Was he human? That's what I want to know."

"He was human all right," she replied quietly. "Too human. Of course he was essentially the scholar—or savant—whatever you like to call it. His work was always to him an intellectual orgy. But he loved the world too. He was a fascinating companion. He seemed to want to get everything possible out of life."

"Why didn't he get it?"

"He was a man," she said, "of sensitive honour."

Godfrey Baltazar threw away the flaming match wherewith he was about to light a cigarette.

"That licks me," said he.

"How?"

"His bolting. Did you know my father very well?"

"I've told you we were great friends."

"Did you know my mother?"

Her eyelids flickered for a moment; but she replied steadily:

"No. I was only a student and your father was my private tutor. But I heard—from other people—a great deal about your mother. I believe she died many years ago, didn't she?"

"Yes. When I was five. I barely remember her.

I was brought up by my uncle and aunt—her people. They scarcely knew my father, and haven't a good word to say about him. It was only when I grew up and developed a sort of taste for mathematics, that I realized what a swell he was. And I can't help being fascinated by the mystery of it. There he was, as far as I can gather, full of money, his own (which he walked off with) and of mother's, beginning to enjoy at thirty a world-wide reputation—and suddenly he disappears off the face of the earth. It wasn't a question of suicide. The man who buys a ticket for the next world doesn't go to peculiar trouble to take all his worldly estate with him. It isn't reasonable, is it?"

"Your father was too much in love with life to go out of it voluntarily," said Sister Baring.

"Then what the blazes did he do, and why did he do it?"

"I don't know," she said.

"Is he alive or dead?"

"How should I know, Mr. Baltazar?"

"He never wrote to you—after——?"

"Why should he have written to me?" she nterrupted.

The rebuke in her voice and eyes sent the young man into confused apologies.

"Naturally not. You must forgive me, Sister; but, as I've told you, I've never met a pal of that mysterious father of mine before. I want to get all the information I can."

She drew a chair and sat by him. The great hall was very still and, in contrast with the vivid sunshine perceived through the eastern windows, very dark. Through the open door came the scents of the summer gardens. The air was a little heavy. She felt her

cap hot around her temples, and lassitude enfeebling her limbs. The strain of the war years began to tell. She had regarded this appointment as a rest from the intolerable toil of the General Hospital in a large town which she had just quitted. Before then she had served in France. And before that—for many years—she had followed the selfless career of the nurse. Now, suddenly, her splendid nerve showed signs of giving. If she had not sat down, her legs would have crumpled up beneath her. So she thought. . . . She looked at the young man, so eager, so proven, so like his father, in gesture and glance, yet in speech and outlook—she was yet to get to that—but she knew the revolutionary influences of the war, the real war, on those who have faced its terrors and become saturated with its abiding philosophies—so different from the fervid creature, John Baltazar, of the mid nineties, who had never dreamed of the possibility of this world convulsion. He had much the same frank charm of manner, the direct simplicity of utterance ; but the mouth was weaker ; the eyes were blue, the eyes of a shrewish blonde—not the compelling, laughing, steel-grey eyes with a queer sparkle in the iris of John Baltazar. All in the young face that was not John Baltazar's was the mother's. She hated the mother dead, as she had loathed her living. Only once had she seen her, a blonde shrew-mouse of a woman. Just a passing by on the Newnham Road, when a companion had pointed her out as Mrs. Baltazar. The little bitter mouth had bitten into her memory : the hard little blue eyes had haunted her for twenty years. The mouth and eyes were there, before her, now. The rest, all that was noble in the boy, was John Baltazar.

"Who has told you the little you do know about him ?" she asked.

"My uncle. My mother's brother. I don't think I have any relations living on my father's side. At any rate, I've not heard of them. We're of old Huguenot stock—Revocation of Edict of Nantes refugees—God knows what we were before. Long ago I happened upon a copy somewhere of the *Annuaire Militaire de l'Armée Française*—and I found a Baltazar in the list. I had an idea of writing him; but I didn't, of course. Now I suppose the poor devil's killed. Anyhow, that's nothing to do with your question. My uncle—Sir Richard Woodcott—they knighted him for manufacturing easily broken hardware round about Birmingham, or for going to chapel, or something—you know the type——"

Again she rebuked him: "I thought you said your uncle brought you up."

"On my mother's fortune—he was my guardian and trustee. But he never let me forget that I was the son of John Baltazar. There was no question of affection from either of them—him or his wife. Anything I did wrong—it was my scoundrel of a father coming out in me. After passing through a childish phase of looking on him as a kind of devil who had blasted my young life, I began to have a sneaking regard for him. You see, don't you? If he was the antithesis of Uncle Richard, he must be somebody I could sympathize with, perhaps rather somebody who could sympathize with me. They drew me into the arms of his memory, so to speak. Odd, isn't it?"

"What specifically did they accuse him of?"

"Oh, everything," he replied, with a careless laugh. "Every depravity under the sun. Colossal egotism and heartlessness the mildest. And of course he drank——"

A sudden red spot flamed in the Sister's cheek and her tired eyes flashed.

"That's a lie! And so is the other. How dare they?"

"Oh, a pacifist knight who is making his fortune out of the war will dare anything. Then, of course, there's what they say about any man who runs away from his wife——"

"To be explicit——?" She leaned an elbow on the table, a cheek on hand, and looked at him steadily

"Well——" he paused, somewhat embarrassed. "Immorality—you know—other women."

"That's not true either. At least, not in that sense. There was another woman. Yes. But only one. And God knows that there could be nothing purer and cleaner and sweeter on this earth than that which was between them."

"I'm more than ready to believe it," said John Baltazar's son. "But—how do you know?"

"It's the story of a dear friend of mine," she replied. "Nothing was hidden from me. The girl couldn't help worshipping him. He was a man to be worshipped. I don't want to speak evil of your mother—there may have been misunderstandings on both sides—but I knew—my friend and I knew—through acquaintances in Cambridge—never from himself—that his married life was very unhappy."

"Look here, Sister," said young Baltazar, putting up an arresting hand. "As we seem to be talking pretty intimately about my affairs, I'll tell you something I've never breathed to a human being. I've no childish memories of being tucked up in bed and kissed to sleep by an angel in woman's form, like children in picture books. Now I come to think of it, I used to envy them. The only vivid thing I remember is being nearly beaten to death with a belt—it was one of those patent leather things women used to wear

round their waists—and then being stuffed away in the coal-hole."

"Oh, you poor mite!" Marcelle straightened herself in her chair, and the tears sprang. "Before you were five! Oh, how damnable! What a childhood you must have had! How did you manage to come through?"

He laughed. "I suppose I'm tough. As soon as I went to school—they sent me at eight years old—I was all right. But never mind about me. Go on with your friend's story. It's getting interesting. I quite see now that my father may have had a hell of a time."

"If you quite see," she said, "there's little more to tell."

She leaned forward again on her elbow and, staring across the great hall, through the wide-open doorway to the lawns and trees drenched in the afternoon sunshine, forgot him and lost herself in the sunshine, the most wonderful that ever was, of the years ago. Godfrey Baltazar looked at her keenly yet kindly, and his stern young lips softened into a smile; and after a bit he stretched out a hand and touched her wrist very gently.

"Tell me," he said in a low voice. "It's good for me, and may be good for you."

She came back to the present with a little sigh.

"It's such a very old story, you see. He was unhappy. His wife's ungovernable temper drove him from the house. He had to lead his intellectual as well as his physical life. He lived most of his time in college. Went home for week-ends—vainly seeking reconciliation. Then the girl threw herself into his life. She worshipped him. She seemed to give him something sweet and beautiful which he had been

looking for. And he fell in love with her. And when she knew it, she was taken up into the Seventh Heaven and she didn't care for God or woman—only for him. It lasted just a month—the end of the summer term. Oh, it was very innocent, as far as that goes—they only met alone in the open air—stolen hours in the afternoon. Only one kiss ever passed between them. And then he said : 'I am a brute and a fool. This can't go on.' She had given herself to him in spirit and was ready to go on and on whithersoever he chose, so long as she was with him ; but she was too shy and tongue-bound to say so. And he stamped along the road, and she by his side, all her heart and soul a-flutter, and he cried : 'My God, I never thought it would have come to this ! My child, forgive me. If ever I hurt a hair of your dear head, may God damn me to all eternity !' And they walked on in silence, and she was frightened—till they came to the turn of the road—this way to Newnham, that to Cambridge. And he gripped her two hands and said : 'If I withered this flower that has blossomed in my path, I should be a damnable villain.' He turned and walked to Cambridge. And the girl, not understanding anything save her love for him, wept bitterly all the way to Newnham. She neither saw him nor heard of him after that. And a week afterwards he disappeared, leaving no trace behind. And whether he's alive or dead she doesn't know till this day. And that is the real story of your father."

He had turned and put both elbows on the intervening table and, head in hand, listened to her words. When she ended, he said :

"Thank God. And thank you. So that is the word of the enigma."

"Yes. There is no other."

"And if he had been less—what shall we say—quixotic—less scrupulous on the point of a woman's honour—you would have followed him to the end of the world——"

"I?" She started back from the table. "I? What do you mean?"

"Why the friend, Sister? Why the camouflage?" He reached out his hand and grasped hers. "Confess."

She returned his pressure, shrugged her shoulders, and said, without looking at him:

"I suppose it was rather thin. Yes. Of course I would have thrown everything to the winds for him. It was on my account that he went away—but, as God hears me, I never sent him."

A long silence stole on them. There was so much that struggled to be said, so little that could be said. At last the young man gripped his crutches and wriggled from his chair. She rose swiftly to aid him.

"Let us have a turn in the sun. It will be good for us."

So they went out and she helped him, against his will—for he loved his triumph over difficulties—down the majestic marble stairs, and they passed the happy tennis courts and the chairs of the cheery invalids looking on at the game, and on through the Japanese garden with its pond of great water-lilies and fairy bridge across, and out of the gate into the little beech wood that screened the house from the home farm. On a rough seat amid the sun-flecked greenery they sat down.

He said: "I may be a sentimental ass, but you seem to be nearer to me than anyone I've ever met in my life."

She made a little helpless gesture. He laughed his pleasant laugh, which robbed his lips of their hardness.

"You supply a long-felt want, you know."

"That sounds rather nice, but I don't quite understand, Mr. Baltazar."

"Oh, Mr. Baltazar be blowed!" he cried. "My name's Godfrey. For God's sake let me hear somebody call me by it! You of all people. Why, you knew me before I was born."

He said it unthinking—a boyish epigram. Her sudden flush brought consciousness of blunder in elemental truth and taste. He sat stiff, horrified; gasped out:

"Forgive me. I didn't realize what I was saying."

She glanced covertly at his young and consternation-stricken face, and her heart went out to him who, after all, on so small a point of delicacy found himself so grievously to blame.

"Perhaps, my dear boy," she said, "it is well that you have touched on this. You and I are grown up and can speak of things frankly—and certain things that people don't usually discuss are often of supreme importance in their own and other people's lives. I didn't know you before you were born, nor did your father. It's he that counts. If he had known, he would never have left your mother to . . . No, no! He would have found some other way. He couldn't have left her. It's incredible. I know it. I know all the strength and the beauty and the wonder of him."

"My God," said the young man, "how you must have loved him!"

"Without loving him, any fool could have looked through his transparent honesty. He was that kind of man."

"Tell me," he said, "all the little silly things you can remember about him."

He re-explained his eagerness. He had been such

a lonely sort of fellow, with no kith or kin with whom he could be in sympathy : an intellectual Ishmaelite—if an inexplicable passion for mathematics and a general sort of craving for the solution of all sorts of problems, human and divine, could be called intellectual—banned by the material, dogmatic, money-obsessed Woodcotts ; referred back, as he had mentioned, for all his darling idiosyncrasies to his unmentionable father. Small wonder that he had built up a sort of cult of the only being who might have taken for him a sympathetic responsibility. And now—this was the greatest day of his life. All his dreams had come true. He was not a sentimental ass, he reasserted. If there was one idiot fallacy that the modern world was exploding, it was the fallacy of the child's debt to his parents for the privilege of bringing him into this silly fool of a world. The only decent attitude of parents towards their children was one of profound apology. It was up to the children to accept it according to the measure of its fulfilment. But, after all, an uncared-for human atom, with intelligence and emotions, could not go through life without stretching out tentacles for some sort of sympathy and understanding. He must owe something of Himself—himself with a capital H—to those who begot and bare him. Mustn't he ? So when they impressed on his young mind, by way almost of an hereditary curse, the identity of his spiritual (or, to their way of thinking, anti-spiritual) outlook with that of his father, he, naturally, stretched out to his unknown father the aforesaid tentacles : especially when he learned later what a great man his father was. Yes, really, he considered it the most miraculous day of his life. He would have given another foot to have it.

" There's another thing," he said. " Once I found

in an old book some odds and ends of his manuscript. I fell to copying his writing, especially his signature. The idiotic thing a boy would do. I got into the trick of it, and I suppose I've never got out. Look."

He scrawled a few words with his signature on the pad. She started. It was like a message from the dead. He laughed and went on with the parable of his father.

"You see," he concluded, "it is gorgeous to know, for a certainty at last, that the Family were vilely wrong, and my own instinct right, all the time."

He had spoken with a touch of the vehemence she so well remembered. And she had let him speak on, for the sake of the memories; also in the hope that he might forget his demand for a revelation of them. But he returned to it.

"Another day," she replied. "These things can't all be dragged at once out of the past. We'll have many opportunities of talking—till your new foot comes."

"You will have another talk—many others, won't you?" he asked eagerly.

"Why should you doubt it?"

"I don't know. Forgive me for saying it—I don't want to be rude, but women are funny sometimes."

She smiled from the wisdom of her superior age—his frankness had the disarming quality of a child. "What do you know of women, Godfrey Baltazar?"

He wrinkled his brow whimsically and rubbed his hair.

"Not much. What man does? Do you know," he asked with the air of a pioneer of thought, "you are all damnably perplexing?"

At this she laughed outright. "Isn't she kind?"

"She—who—oh, yes. How did you guess?"

"The way of Nature varies very little. What about her?"

"She would be all right, if it weren't for my brother——"

"Your brother? Oh, of course——" She had to reach back into unimportant memories. "Your mother was a widow when she married—with an only son."

"That's it. Seven or eight years older than I am. Name of Doon. Christened Leopold. We never hit it off. I've loathed the beggar all my life; but he's a damn fine soldier. Major. D.S.O. Doing splendid work. But the brute has the whole of himself left, and isn't a dot and carry one like me."

"And the lady?"

"I'll tell you another time—in one of our many talks. At present it doesn't seem to amount to a row of pins compared with my meeting you. My hat!" he exclaimed after a pause. "It's a funny little world."

He thrust his hands into his pockets and stretched out his legs, the end of the maimed one supported on the crutch. The afternoon peace of the beech wood enfolded them in their contemplation of the funny little world. She looked at him—young, strong, full of the delight of physical and intellectual life, reckoning as of no account the sacrifice to his country of much that made that physical existence full of precious meaning; hiding deep in his English soul all the significance of his familiar contempt for death; a son whom any mother might be proud to have brought into the world. And tears were very near her eyes when she thought of what might have been. And all her heart went out to him suddenly in a great gush of emotion, as though she had found her own son, and the tears

started. She laid rather a timid hand on his shoulder.

"My dear," she said, "let us be great friends for the sake of the bond between us."

He started at her touch, and plucking both hands from his pockets, imprisoned hers in them.

"Friends! You're a dear. The dearest thing in the world. You're going to be the only woman I've ever loved. Why, you're crying!"

Her wet eyes glistened. "We're all damnably perplexing, aren't we?"

"You're not. Not a little bit." He kissed her hand and let it go. "You're straight and adorable. But what can I call you?"

"Call me?" The question was a little shock. "You can call me by my name, if you like—when we are alone—Marcelle."

"Splendid!" he cried. "The long-felt want. I've had as many Sisters as my young life can stand."

She rose, helped him to rise.

"I hope," she said, "you will remain the boy that you are for a very long time."

CHAPTER II

AFTER this they had the many talks which they had promised themselves, and she told him the little things about John Baltazar which he had craved to learn. And the young man told her of his ambitions and his hopes and his young despairs. The last mainly concerned one Dorothy Mackworth, a Warwickshire divinity in a silk tennis sweater and tam-o'-shanter, whose only imperfection, if the word could be applied to tragic misfortune, was her domination by some diabolic sorcery which made her look more kindly on the black Leopold, his brother, than on himself. Her age? Seventeen. "You poor babies," thought Marcelle. Once she said:

"Why worry? You can find a thousand little Dorothys in a week if you look for them—all a-growing and a-blowing, with never a wicked spell on them at all."

"You are wrong," he replied. "One can find thousands of Susans and Janes and Gertrudes—all very charming girls, I admit; but there's only one Dorothy. She's very remarkable. She has an intellect. She has a distracting quality, something uncanny, you know, in her perceptions and intuitions. I'm dead serious, Marcelle, believe me——"

She let him talk his heart out. Her soul, dry and athirst, drank in his boy's freshness—how greedily she scarcely realized. In her character of nurse she had

acted as Mother Confessor to many a poor lonely wretch ; but in every case she had felt it was to the nun-descended uniform she wore, to its subconsciously recognized sanctity, and not to the mere kindly woman beneath, that she owed the appeal or the revelation. But now to young Godfrey Baltazar she was intensely, maternally woman. Foolishly woman in her unconfessed craving to learn the details of his life and character and outlook on the world.

Once he checked an egotistic exposition.

"Look here," he said, struck by a sudden qualm, "I'm always holding forth about myself—what about you ?"

"There's nothing about me. I'm just a nurse. A nurse is far too busy and remote from outside things to be anything else than a nurse."

"But you started out as a mathematical swell at Newnham. Oh, yes, you did ! Men like my father don't coach rotters—least of all women. What happened ? You went in for the Tripos, of course ?"

She shook her head. "No, my dear. The magic had gone out of my life. I tried Newnham for half the next term—facing the music—but it was too much for me. I broke down. I had to earn my livelihood. My original idea was teaching. I gave it up. Took to nursing instead. And now you know the whole story of my life."

"I can't understand anybody really bitten with mathematics giving it up."

She smiled. "I don't think I was really bitten. Not like you."

Then she led him from herself to his own ambitions, on this as on other occasions. Gradually she established between them a relationship very precious. It was the aftermath of her own romance.

One day, business calling her to London, she changed into mufti, and hurried down the front steps to the car that was to take her to the station. She found Godfrey waiting by the car door.

"My word! You look topping!" he cried in blatant admiration, and she blushed with pleasure like a girl.

He begged for a jaunt to the station and back. The air would do him good. She assented, and they drove off.

"You look younger than ever," he went on. "It's a sin to hide your beautiful hair under that wretched Sister's concern. Now I see really the kind of woman you are——"

"What have clothes got to do with it?"

"Lots. The way you select them, the way you put them on, the way you express yourself in them. No one can express themselves in a beastly uniform. Now, all kinds of instincts, motives, feelings, went into that hat. There's a bit of defiance in it. As who should say: 'Now that I'm an ordinary woman again, demureness be damned!'"

She said: "I'm glad I meet with your lordship's approval," and she felt absurdly happy for the rest of the day. In her heart she thanked God that he regarded her not merely as a kind old thing to whom, as a link between himself and his father, he was benevolently disposed. Out of sight, she would then be out of his mind. But she held her own as a woman; unconsciously had held it all the time. Now the little accident of the meeting in mufti secured her triumph. When he left the home he would not drift away from her.

He had said on the platform, waiting for her train:

"As soon as we can fix it up, I'll get hold of Dorothy, and you and I and she'll have a little beano at the Carlton. I do so want her to meet you."

The wish, she reflected afterwards, signified much: Dorothy to meet her, not she to meet Dorothy. The kind old thing, as a matter of boyish courtesy, would be asked to meet Dorothy. But Dorothy was to meet somebody in whom he took a certain pride.

She remembered a story told her by a friend who had gone to see her boy at a famous public school on the occasion of the Great Cricket Match. At the expansive moment of parting he said: "Mother, I suppose you know that the men feel it awfully awkward being seen with their people, but as you were out and away the most beautiful woman in the crowd, I went about not caring a hang."

She would have to get herself up very smart for Dorothy. In the train coming back she fell a-dreaming. If John Baltazar and she had stuck it out in all honour for a few years, Death, which was in God's hands and not theirs, would have solved all difficulties. They would have been married. The five-year-old child would have called her "mother." She would be "mother" still to this gallant lad whose youth and charm had suddenly swept through the barren chambers of her heart.

And in the night she asked again the question which in the agonized moments of past years she had cried to the darkness: "Why?"

Why had he left her? If he had been strong enough to keep love within the bounds of perfect friendship, she, the unawakened girl, living in passionate commune with intellectual and spiritual ideals, would have found for some years, at least, all her cravings satisfied in such a tender and innocent intercourse. And if he

had claimed her body and her soul, they were his for the taking.

So why? Why the breaking of so many lives? His own, so vivid, most of all?

In the quivering splendour of her one girlish month of love, a distracted Semele, she had scarcely seen her Jovian lover, as he was in human form. She pictured him, Heaven knows how romantically. But always, in her picturing, she took for granted the canon of chiaroscuro, of light and shade. In judging him afterwards, she had no conception of a being to whom compromise was damnation. A phrase—an instinctive cutter of Gordian knots—might have brought illumination; but there was none to utter it.

She was amazed, dumbfounded, conscience-stricken, all but soul-destroyed, when the astounding fact of John Baltazar's disappearance became known. The familiar houses and trees and hedges on the Newnham Road pointed to her as accusing witnesses. Yet she kept her own counsel, and, keeping it, suffered to breaking-point. Many months passed before she could look life again squarely in the face—and then it was the new life that had lasted for so many years. And still, with all her experience of human weakness and human fortitude, she lay awake asking herself the insoluble question.

So little occasion had been given for scandal, that her name was associated in no man or woman's mind with the extraordinary event. Clue to John Baltazar's disappearance, save the notorious shrewishness of his wife, there was none. Common Rooms, heavy with the secular atmosphere of casuistic argument, speculated in vain. A man of genius, destined to bring the

University once more into world-wide fame—watched, therefore, by the University with sedulous care and affection ; a man with the prizes of the earth (from the academic point of view) dangling within his grasp, does not, they contended, forsake all and go out into the darkness because his wife happens to be a scold. Another woman ? To Common Rooms the idea was preposterous. Besides, if there had been one, the married members would have picked up in their homes the gossip of one of the most nervous gossip centres in the United Kingdom. Mad, perhaps ? But Mrs. Baltazar proclaimed loudly the sagacious method by which he realized his private fortune before setting out for the Unknown. And Common Rooms, like Marcelle, asked the same perplexing question : Why ?

The next day, in the grounds of Churton Towers, the young man, returning to his father's fascinating mystery, propounded the dilemma that had kept her from sleep the night before, and he, in his turn, asked : "Why ?"

"The only solution of it is," said he, "that he burned the house down in order to roast the pig."

She flashed a glance at him. "You seem to know him better than I."

At that moment, John Baltazar, about whom there was all this coil, leaning over the gate of a derelict and remote moorland farmstead, perhaps asked himself the same question ; for in moments of intellectual and physical relaxation he was wont, like most solitaires, to look down the vista of his years.

A low granite wall, in which was set the wooden gate, encircled the few acres of his domain. Behind him, a one-storied, granite-built, thatched dwelling and

the adjoining stable and byre and pigsties and dismantled dairy. Surrounding the building, with little selection as to appropriateness of site, were flower garden, mostly of herbaceous plants, vegetable garden, wire-enclosed poultry runs variegated with white Wyandottes and Rhode Island Reds, and half an acre of rough grass on which some goats were tethered.

John Baltazar leaned over the gate and, smoking his cherrywood pipe, gazed with the outer eye on the familiar scene of desolate beauty. Within his horizon he was the only visible human being, his the only human habitation. All around him spread the rolling landscape of granite and heather and wind-torn shrub. The granite hills, some surmounted by gigantic and shapeless masses of rock left freakishly behind in glacial movements of unknown times, glowed amethyst and pale coral ; the heather slopes in the sunlight blazed in the riot of royal purple, and the shadowed plains lay in a sullen majesty of gloom. Heather and granite, granite and heather, moorland and mountain, beauty and barrenness. God and granite and heather. No place for man. No more a place for man than the Sahara. For man, to his infinite despair, had tried it ; had built the rude farmstead ; had, Heaven knows why—perhaps through pathetic pride of ownership—with infinite sweating, piled up the three-foot ring of stones, had sought to cultivate the illusory covering of earth, had dug till his sinews cracked and turned up the eternal granite instead of clods, and had sickened and starved and died ; and had abandoned the stricken place to the unhelpful sun and the piercing winds and the snows—and to John Baltazar, who now, smoking his pipe, formed part of this tableland of desolation.

Fifty, he looked ten years younger. A short, uncombed thatch of coarse brown hair showed no

streak of grey ; nor did a closely clipped moustache of a lighter shade. His broad forehead was singularly serene, save for an accusing deep vertical line between the brows. And a faint criss-cross network, too, appeared beneath the strong grey eyes when they were dimmed by relaxation of effort, but vanished almost magically when they were illuminated by thought. A grey sweater, somewhat tightly fitting, revealed a powerful frame. Knickerbockers and woollen stockings and heavy shoes completed his attire. His hands, glazed and coarsened, at first sight betrayed the labourer rather than the scholar. But the fingers were sensitively long, and the deep filbert nails showed signs of personal fastidiousness, as did his closely shaven cheek.

A wire-coated Airedale came to him and sought his notice. He turned and caressed the dog's head.

"Well, old son, finished the day's work ? You're a rotten old fraud, you know, pretending to be bossing around, and never doing a hand's turn for anybody."

The dog, as though to justify his existence, barked, darted a yard away, ran up, barked again, and once more started.

"Dinner-time already ? "

The sound of the word signified to the dog the achievement of his mission. He barked and leaped joyously as his master slowly strolled towards the house. On the threshold appeared a young Chinaman, of smiling but dignified demeanour, wearing Chinese dress.

"Dinner is served, sir," he said, making way respectfully for Baltazar to pass.

"So Brutus has just informed me, Quong Ho."

"I sent him to tell you, sir. He is possessed of almost human understanding."

"It is always good," said Baltazar, "to associate with intelligent beings."

He entered the house-piece, the one large living-room of the building, and took his place at a small table by a western window, simply but elegantly set with clean cloth and napkin, shining silver and glass, and a little bowl of roses placed on a strip of blue-and-gold Chinese embroidery. It was a room, at the first glance, of characterless muddle ; at the second, of studied order. A long, narrow room, built north and south, with two windows on the west side and two on the east. An old-fashioned cooking range stretched beneath the great chimney-piece that took up most of the northern end, for the room was rudely planned as kitchen and dining-room and parlour and boudoir all combined, and hams in the brief days of its prosperity had hung from its rafters. The spaces on the distempered walls not occupied by unpainted deal bookshelves were filled with long silken rolls of Chinese paintings. Turkey carpets covered the stone floor. Nearly the whole length of the eastern wall ran a long deal table, piled with manuscripts and pamphlets, but with a clear writing space by the north-east window, at which stood a comfortably cushioned writing-chair. A settee and an arm-chair by the chimney corner, an old oak chest of drawers that seemed to wonder what it did in that galley, a bamboo occasional table and the little dining-table by the south-western window, completed the furniture. But the room was spotlessly clean. Everything that could shine shone. Every pile of papers on the long deal table was squared with mathematical precision.

The young Chinaman served the dinner which he had prepared—curried eggs, roast chicken, goat's milk cheese—with the deftness of long training. He paused, expectant, with an unstoppered decanter.

" Burgundy, sir ? "

"No, thank you."

Quong Ho filled a tumbler with water.

"How long has that half-bottle of wine been opened?"

"If I remember accurately, sir, this is the fifteenth day."

"It's not fit to drink, Quong Ho. To-morrow you will throw it away and open another half-bottle."

"It shall be done as you wish, sir," said Quong Ho. "Except, sir, that I do not propose to waste the wine, for though it is too stale for drinking purposes, it is an invaluable adjunctive in cookery for soups and sauces."

Baltazar drank a draught of water and, wiping his lips, looked over his shoulder at the Chinaman.

"Adjunctive? That's a new word. Where did you get hold of it?"

"Possibly from you, sir, who have been my master in the English language for the last ten years."

"You didn't get it from me. It's a beast of a word."

"Then, possibly, sir, I have met it in my independent reading. Perhaps in *The Rambler* of your celebrated philosopher, Johnson, which I have been perusing lately with great interest."

Baltazar leaned back in his chair.

"Quong Ho," said he, "you're a gem. A gem of purest ray serene——"

"The words I recognize as those of Poet Gray," said Quong Ho.

"That is true," said Baltazar. "But destiny, as far as I have the handling of things, won't condemn you to a vast unfathomed cave of ocean. What I tried to imply was, that you're a wonderful fellow—what the Americans in their fruity idiom, which I haven't yet taught you, call a peach."

"I will make a mental note of it, sir," said Quong Ho.

Baltazar grinned over his plate and went on with his dinner, the dog Brutus by his side watching the process with well-bred yearning, and accepting an occasional mouthful with a gluttony politely concealed. Towards the close of the meal Quong Ho brought in lamps and candles—Baltazar loved vivid illumination—and drew the curtains. In the house Quong Ho wore Chinese slippers and walked like a ghost. He began to clear away as soon as Baltazar rose from the table. The latter filled and lit his pipe and consulted his watch.

"You can come for your lesson in an hour's time."

"In an hour precisely," said Quong Ho.

"Have you prepared the work I set you?"

"With thorough perfection, sir."

"You'll be President of the Chinese Republic yet," said Baltazar.

"It is no mean ambition," said Quong Ho.

Baltazar took a book from his shelves devoted to general reading—an amazing medley of dingy volumes such as one sees only in an ill-arranged second-hand bookseller's stock. It was a second-hand bookseller's stock in literal truth, for Baltazar had bought a catalogue *en bloc*. It save infinite trouble. The collection provided him with years of miscellaneous feeding. It contained little that was modern, nothing that was of contemporary moment; on the other hand, it gave him many works which he had ear-marked for perusal, hitherto in vain, from his boyhood. There were the works of Robertson—the Histories of Scotland, Charles V and America; Davila's Wars in France; the Aldine Edition of the British Poets in many volumes; an incomplete Dodsley's Old Plays; the works of one

Surtees—he who wrote of the immortal Jorrocks and Soapy Sponge and Facey Romford ; Elzevir editions of Saint Augustine and Tertullian ; The Architectural Beauties of England and Wales ; Livingstone's Travels ; and Queechy, by the author of The Wide, Wide World. A haggis of a library. No one but John Baltazar could have bought it at one impulsive swoop.

He took down the volume, almost haphazard, for it was his luxurious custom to devote after dinner a digestive hour to haphazard reading ; a bound volume of pamphlets, which had once entertained him with *The Times* reprint of the Obituary of The Duke of Wellington. He sat down in his arm-chair, turned over some dreary pages, tried to interest himself in "What is it all About ? or an Enquiry into the Statements of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon that the Church of England Teaches Salvation by Baptism, instead of Salvation by the Blood of our Blessed Master Jesus Christ, and that Many of the Clergy are guilty of Dishonesty and Perjury, by the Rev. Joseph Bardsley, M.A.," sadly shook his head, and, turning over more gloomy pages, came upon an oasis in the desert : "The Fight at Dame Europa's School, showing how the German Boy thrashed the French Boy, and how the English Boy looked on." He read the mordant sarcasm of eighteen hundred and seventy-one with great enjoyment, and had just finished it when Quong Ho, notebook under arm, entered the room.

"Quong Ho," said he, "I've just been reading a famous satirical pamphlet on the part which England played in the Franco-Prussian War. When you have time you might read it. The English is impeccable. You won't find any 'adjunctives' in it. It lashes England for not having gone to the help of France in 1870."

"Why should one nation undertake another's quarrel?" asked Quong Ho, with a curious flash in his eyes. "Why should China shed her blood for the sake, by way of illustration, of Denmark?"

"There is an answer, Quong Ho," replied Baltazar, "to your astute question. In ancient times China and Denmark were as far apart as Neptune and Mercury. But wireless telegraphy has brought them to each other's frontiers. Nowadays nations act and react on one another in a very subtle way. You must read a little more of modern European History, for Europe is the nerve-centre of a system of nervous telepathy which forms a network round the earth. Nothing can happen in Europe nowadays without its sensitive reaction in China. You must remember that, at every instant of your life, if you wish to model a new China. For the old China has gone. I loved it, as you know, Quong Ho. But it's as dead as Assyria. Another struggle between France and Germany would implicate the civilized world. Great Britain would not look on as in 1870, but would be on the side of France, and Japan would be on the side of Great Britain, and China——"

"Would throw her lot into the same scale as Japan," said Quong Ho demurely.

"Let us hope it never will happen," said Baltazar. "In the meantime there's something of greater importance." He rose, went to his writing-chair by the long deal table. "Let us see. What is it to-night? Elliptic Functions, isn't it?"

And while John Baltazar, serene in his reading of political philosophy, was guiding Quong Ho through mazes of mathematical abstraction, German aircraft were dropping bombs about England.

CHAPTER III

THE renting of Spendale Farm, derelict for many years, caused some excitement on the moorland. It had achieved notoriety by concentrating in its small acreage every disadvantage that a farm could have. A soil so barren and granitic that scarcely grass would grow on it; a situation of bleakness unique in that bleak and unsheltered region; an inaccessibility almost beyond the powers of transport. The last was the final factor in the bankruptcy and despair of former tenants. Three miles of foot-and-waggon-worn track —and this now indistinguishable—must be traversed before striking a road, and along five miles of the road must one go before reaching the tiny town of Water-End, which contained the nearest railway station, shop, post office and church. Excitement grew in Water-End when motor lorries and materials and workmen from the cathedral town, thirty miles off, all made their daily way to Spendale Farm, and later, when packing-cases marked "Books, with the greatest care" were dumped on the station platform. All bore the name of John Baltazar—an outlandish name, if ever there was one, to eyes and ears of remotely rural England. And when the demented foreigner—for so they conceived him to be—was due to arrive in order to take up his residence, a fact proclaimed by the presence outside the station of Farmer Benstead's old grey mare and springless cart which Ellis and Dean,

the local estate agents, were known to have bought for the new-comer, the population of Water-End turned out to see what manner of being he was. The hefty, quickly moving Englishman, obviously the master, disappointed their anticipations; but the Chinaman, his coiled pigtail unconcealed beneath the brim of a bowler hat too small for him, made their eyes bulge with wonder. They did not even know he was a Chinaman until the vicar's son, a lad of sixteen, unavowed emissary of a curious vicarage, gave them the information. Master and man drove off alone in the cart with their luggage, in the midst of gaping silence.

A Chinaman. What was a Chinaman doing in those parts? Men speculated in the bar parlour of "The Three Feathers." Gossips of the more timorous sex discussed the possibility of a yellow peril—children kidnapped, throats cut, horrors perpetrated in lonely places. Mrs. Trevenna had seen murder in his eye; and Mrs. Trevenna, who had buried three husbands, was a woman whose opinion was respected. Mrs. Bates said his yellow hands were like the claws of a turkey-cock. Her daughter, Gwinnie, giggling, remarked that she wouldn't like to have them round her neck.

"That's what I've heard they do," said old Mrs. Sopwith. "I remember my grandfather, him that was in the Indian Mutiny, telling me, when I was a little girl, that they thought nothing of strangling you. It was their religion."

Thus the amiable Quong Ho leapt at once into a pretty repute—of which an addiction to Thuggee was a venial aspect.

But when, a few days afterwards, Quong Ho drove into Water-End on a shopping expedition, and in the

presence of palpitating Water-Enders carried on his business and passed remarks on the weather, polite and smiling, in the easy English of the vicar and the motoring gentlefolk, with no perceptible trace of a foreign accent, they gaped once more in amazement. Language is a marvellous solvent of prejudice. No one who talked English like the vicar could strangle English necks. But Quong Ho, unfortunately, complicated this favourable impression by overdoing the perfect Briton.

At the butcher's door, fresh-coloured as the carcasses hanging at each side, stood Gwinnie Bates, the leader of the staring crowd, blocking the way. Quong Ho, trained theoretically by Baltazar in European ceremonial, swept her a bow with his billycock hat—a bow composite of the court of Charles the Second and Ratcliffe Highway, and addressed her :

" Beauteous Madam, will you allow your devoted servant the privilege of a passage ? "

She melted hysterically from the doorway. Her friends, like a grinning Red Sea, divided into an avenue through which passed Quong Ho, with gestures courteously expressive of thanks, followed by the butcher's assistant carrying to the cart the leg of mutton and the joint of beef which Quong Ho had purchased. Quong Ho drove off amid unceremonial guffaws and gigglings.

" Beauteous Madam ! Oh, Hell ! " roared the butcher's assistant.

Gwinnie Bates checked her mirth and advanced with flushed cheeks and defiant eyes.

" What's wrong about it, Johnnie Evans ? If you want to insult me, say it out. If you can't be a gentleman, at least be a man."

" Pretty fine gentleman," sneered Johnnie Evans, jerking a thumb towards the receding Chinaman.

"He can teach manners to the likes of you, at any rate," cried Gwinnie Bates, and went off triumphant with her head in the air.

Thus, through the courteous demeanour of Quong Ho on this and subsequent occasions, Water-End became divided into two camps—Sinophile and Sinophobe. The latter party asserted that such heathen smiled most when their designs were most criminal, and carried out their activities to the accompaniment of unholy mirth. Was he ever seen at church or chapel? His admirers confessed this abstention from the means of grace. Did he ever speak of the doings of his master with the outlandish name, and himself, in the middle of the moor? Quong Ho was admitted to be a museum-piece of discretion. And as time went on, although his ways were marked by the same perfect courtesy, he lost favour amongst his party, through a bland taciturnity and a polite rejection of conversational advantage.

Now for this taciturnity there were excellent reasons; none other than the commands of John Baltazar. When Quong Ho returned the first time to the farm with the jeering laughter ringing in his ears, he bewailed the impoliteness of the inhabitants of Water-End. Said Baltazar in Chinese:

"Dost thou not know the proverb, Quong Ho, '*A man must insult himself before others will*'? And again, what saith the Master? '*Rotten wood cannot be carved, and walls made of dirt and mud cannot be plastered.*' By acting against my orders and striving to plaster the muddy walls of these rustics with ceremonial politeness, you have insulted yourself and therefore exposed yourself to rudeness."

"Master," said Quong Ho, "it appears that I have erred grievously."

"Listen again," said Baltazar, with a twinkle in his eyes unperceived by the downcast Quong Ho, "to what the Master saith: '*The failure to cultivate virtue, the failure to examine and analyse what I have learnt, the inability to move towards righteousness after being shown the way, the inability to correct my faults—these are the causes of my grief.*'"

Quong Ho replied that although his deviation from the path of virtue was glaring to the most myopic vision, he nevertheless was in a dilemma, inasmuch as he had followed the precepts of Western courteous observance, the ceremonial, for instance, of the hat-salutation, laid down for him by his illustrious teacher.

Baltazar, always in Chinese, replied kindly: "O youth of indifferent understanding, is it not written in the Shû King in the Charge to Yüeh: '*In learning there should be a humble mind and the maintenance of a constant earnestness: in such a case improvement will surely come. When a man's thoughts from first to last are constantly fixed on learning, his virtuous cultivation comes unperceived*'?"

"With those truths am I acquainted," replied Quong Ho.

"Then, my good fellow," retorted Baltazar in English, "why the devil don't you apply them? I've absolutely forbidden you to have any intercourse whatever with the people round about. You're not to talk to them about my concerns or your concerns. You're not to listen to any of their talk or to bring back to me scraps of their rotten gossip. You're to go to Water-End on necessary business—unfortunately we can't live on air or warm ourselves in the winter with bottled sunbeams—but that's the limit. Outside of that you're a man deaf and dumb. You're to go one better than the three Sacred Apes of Japan, who, holding hands

respectively before eyes, ears and mouth, signify 'I see no evil; I hear no evil; and I speak no evil.' In your case, it's to be: 'I see nothing; I hear nothing; I speak nothing.'"

"In future," said Quong Ho, "my eyes shall be blinded, my ears sealed and my mouth locked."

"If there are any more animated discussions of last week's thunderstorms, or further Beauteous-Madamizing of young females, I'll regretfully have to send you straight back to China."

The unblinking stare in Baltazar's great grey eyes and the obstinate set of his lips—signs of purpose which Quong Ho for eight years had learned to gauge with infallible precision—caused him to quake excessively. Not only was his servitude to Baltazar a matter of oath, but a return before the completion of the special education which would enable him to take immediate rank in New China, would be the deathblow to his ambitions. So Quong Ho took to heart the precepts of the Humble Mind and swore to outdo the Sacred Apes of Japan, even as his master had ordained.

After this, in the first days of their Thebaïd, master and man held frequent conversations on the relations with the outside world which the former had prescribed. The three years, said Baltazar, which lay before them in the solitude of the wilderness, were for the maceration of the flesh, the pursuit of virtue and the cultivation of the intellect. He illustrated his argument with countless quotations from the Chinese classics.

"In this fashion, Quong Ho," said he, "you are drinking of the *Five Sources of Happiness.* To wit: *Long Life:* for here, in this unpolluted atmosphere, you are acquiring physical health. *Riches:* they will

be yours in no matter what University of Modern China you go to as Professor of Mathematics. *Soundness of Body and Serenity of Mind:* the Latins put the idea into epigrammatic form—Mens sana in corpore sano; what can be more conducive to serenity of mind than this studious solitude, undisturbed by material cares? *The Love of Virtue:* we have every hour of all our days to acquire it. *Fulfilling to the end the* WILL; is it not the WILL that has set us here?"

"Indubitatively," said Quong Ho.

"Hearken again," said Baltazar, "to the *Six Extreme Evils. Misfortune shortening the Life:* from that no man is exempt—but from it no men are more than we protected. *Sickness:* likewise—but I have a box of simple remedies, and if the worst comes, there is a man learned in physic at Water-End. *Distress of Mind:* if our minds in these ideal surroundings are so unstable as to be distressed, we are unworthy of the name of philosophers. *Poverty:* I have an ample fortune. *Wickedness:* we, who are Seekers after Truth, have deliberately set ourselves beyond the reach of Temptation. *Weakness:* that, O Quong Ho, is the only danger. You must be on your guard against it night and day, especially on the days when necessity exposes you to the manifold temptations of that microcosm of Babylon, Pekin and San Francisco which goes by the name of Water-End."

So it came to pass that when astounding tidings, the most pregnant in the world's history, came to Water-End and the little townlet blazed with the wildfire of gossip, Quong Ho, scrupulous obeyer of Law, heard without listening and, forbearing to question, always returned to Spendale Farm with a mind rendered, with Oriental deliberation, so profoundly blank as to preclude the possibility of retailing to his master the

idle news of the outer world. And gradually, such is the contempt bred by familiarity, Quong Ho lost prestige in Water-End. His weekly appearance in the town, with old grey mare and cart, grew to be one of the commonplace recurrent phenomena such as the Vicar's Sunday sermon and the Saturday evening orgy and home-convoying of old Jack Bonnithorne, the champion alcoholist of the moorland.

But around Baltazar of the one brief glimpse arose many a legend. He was mad. He was a magician. He was an unspeakable voluptuary ; though whence and how arrived the houris who ministered to his voluptuousness, was an insoluble problem. He was a missionary with one convert. The theory, put forward by the farmers, that he was merely weak in his head, gained the most general acceptance. Then some one whispered that he was a German spy. The valiant of the town planned an expedition at dead of night to surprise him at his nefarious practices ; but the sarcasms of Police-Sergeant Doubleday, who asked what information useful to the enemy, save the crop of heather per square acre, could be given by a man inhabiting the most desolate spot in the United Kingdom, checked their enterprise. Their ardour, too, was damped by a spell of torrential rain, which robbed of its pleasantness the prospect of a sixteen-mile walk. When the sun came out, the suspicion had faded from their minds, and shortly afterwards most of them found themselves in the King's uniform in regions far distant from Water-End.

One morning Police-Sergeant Doubleday lay in wait for Quong Ho outside the Bank, and informed him that he must register himself as an alien, under the Defence of the Realm Act. Quong Ho blandly accompanied the Sergeant to the Police Station and

complied with the formalities. Full name: Li Quong Ho. Nationality: Chinese. Occupation: Student.

"Eh?" cried Sergeant Doubleday, a vast, red-faced man with a scrubby black moustache. "That won't do. Aren't you Mr. What's-his-name's man-servant?"

"That sphere of my activities is purely incidental," said Quong Ho. "Kindly put down 'student.'"

"What do you study?"

"Specialized branches of Western Philosophy," replied Quong Ho.

"Well, I'm damned!" said the mystified Doubleday. "Anyhow, it's none of my business."

So down went Quong Ho as "student"—the only alien on the register.

"That's very interesting," said the Vicar, during his next chat with Doubleday. "The Chinese are a remarkable race. Their progress should be watched."

"I'm afraid it can't be done, sir. What with being short-handed and overworked as it is——"

At the Vicar's explanation the Sergeant mopped his forehead in relief.

"I've a man's job to keep Christians in order, without shadowing the heathen," said he.

"I'm convinced that his master and himself are a pair of harmless eccentrics," said the Vicar.

And the Vicar's word went the round of the district, and eccentrics, or the nearest approach to it that local tongues could manage, the inhabitants of Spendale Farm were finally designated—though what were "eccentrics" remained a matter of pleasant and fruitful conjecture.

When Quong Ho returned to the farmhouse after his encounter with Sergeant Doubleday, he said noth-

ing about his registration as an alien. Nor did it occur to him to show the paper money which he had received in lieu of the usual gold in exchange for the cheque which he had cashed at the bank ; for the disposal of petty cash did not concern John Baltazar, who trusted in the Chinaman's scrupulous honesty. That, in spite of the most definite orders, he should leave Baltazar uninformed of the various signs and tokens of national unrest which he had observed at Water-End, caused Quong Ho occasional twinges of conscience. He remembered the saying : "*To shirk your duty when you see it before you, shows want of moral courage.*" But what was his duty ? On the other hand, there was the dictum : "*To sacrifice to a spirit with which you have nothing to do is mere servility.*" What had he to do with this purely English war-spirit that he should servilely sacrifice to it his almost filial obligations ? Obviously nothing. Quong Ho therefore continued to purvey no idle gossip, and went about his varied avocations with a serene mind.

Now, as John Baltazar, who had been dead to the English-speaking world for nearly twenty years, held correspondence with no one save a few necessary tradesmen, mostly booksellers, as he took in no periodical, daily, weekly, monthly or annual of any kind whatever, and as he conversed with no human being except Quong Ho, whose lips he had sealed, he had created for himself an almost perfect barrage through which the news of contemporary happenings could not penetrate.

"Quong Ho," he had said, one Spring day, soon after his return from China, when he had come to one of those revolutionary decisions that marked the crises of his life, "I have sworn by the spirits of my ancestors to live the life of a recluse for the space of

three years, holding communication with no man or woman and cutting myself off like one that is dead from the interests of the contemporaneous world. My reasons for this determination I will eventually unfold to you, provided you carry out faithfully the contract I am about to propose. If you decline to bind yourself, which as a free man you are at liberty to do, I will pay your passage back to China and give you a sum of money adequate to start you on an honest career. If you accept it, I will honourably perform my part. You have been my servant and my pupil for the last eight years——"

"You saved this miserable orphan from death at the hands of a tyrannic governor," interposed Quong Ho—they were speaking his native tongue—"you have taught him the language of England and the philosophies both of East and West, and you are to me as a father to whom I owe filial fidelity and devotion."

"That is well said, Quong Ho," replied Baltazar. "This person appreciates your professions of loyalty." The scene of this memorable conversation, by the way, was a small bedroom at the top of the Savoy Hotel; Baltazar, with bloodshot eyes, a splitting headache and tousled raiment, sitting on the bed, and Quong Ho, impeccably vested in Chinese attire, standing before him. "He has not been honourably blessed with sons, and therefore will receive from you the devotedness that is due to a parent. But for the space of three years only. There may come a time when exaggerated filial zeal may become embarrassing."

And he set forth the contract. In return for the absolute obedience of Quong Ho and his acceptance of the life of a recluse for three years, he undertook to send him back to China as the most accomplished native mathematician in existence—for he had already

gauged the young man's peculiar genius—with a Master of Arts' degree, if possible, from some British University, and thus assure him a distinguished position in that New China whose marvellous future had been the subject of so many of their dreams and discussions. And Quong Ho had taken solemn oaths of fealty and with the Chinaman's singleness of purpose, accepted, a few weeks later, the deadly and enduring solitude of the moorland as an unquestionable condition of existence.

Secure in the unswerving fidelity of Quong Ho, and in the impregnable seclusion of this God-disclosed hermitage, John Baltazar lived a life according to his ideals. No outer ripple of the maelstrom in which the world was engulfed lapped, however faintly, against the low granite wall encircling the low-built granite farmhouse. His retirement was absolute, his retreat off the track of the most casual wanderer.

Six months passed before his eyes rested on a human being other than Quong Ho. It is true that the rate-collector, savagely cursing his luck and the bicycle-destroying track that led from the road to the farmhouse, had appeared one day with a paper showing certain indebtedness ; but Quong-Ho had received it and, gravely promising a cheque in payment, had dismissed the intruder. No other official came near the place. Quong Ho called weekly at the post office and railway station, to the great relief of postman and van-driver.

"Thought and money acutely applied," remarked Baltazar, "together with freedom from the entanglement of family relationships, are the determining factors of human happiness. A man with these factors at his disposal is a fool if he cannot fashion for himself whatever kind of existence he pleases."

But one day, a cloudless winter morning, when the sunshine kissing the frost-bound earth transmuted the myriad frondage of the heather into a valley of diamonds, Baltazar, on his way from the stable to the front door, came across a stranger leaning over the gate. He was a heavy man with a fat, clean-shaven face, loose lips and little furtive eyes. He wore a new golfing suit exaggerated in cut and aggressive in colour.

He said with easy familiarity: "Good morning, Mr. Baltazar."

"Since you know my name," replied Baltazar, with an air of courtesy, "it has doubtless struck you that this is my gate."

"Of course——"

"You are leaning on it," said Baltazar.

The visitor, perplexed, straightened himself.

"I'm a sort of neighbour of yours, you know. I live about seven miles off—the big property this side of Water-End: Cedar Chase—and I've often thought I'd run over in the Rolls-Royce as far as I could, and walk the rest, and see how you were getting along."

"That is most amiable of you," said Baltazar, advancing to the gate and resting his arm on it with an easy suggestion of proprietorship. "You have run over, you have walked—and now you see."

Before Baltazar's ironical gaze the stranger's eyelids fluttered in disconcertment.

"I fancied you might be lonely and might like to look in and have a game of bridge one of these days. My name's Pillivant."

"Pillivant," said Baltazar. "I don't much like it, but there are doubtless worse."

"You may have heard it. Pillivant and Co.,

Timber Merchants. We've rather come to the front lately."

"Your personal initiative, I should imagine," said Baltazar.

"I don't say as it isn't," replied Mr. Pillivant. "When whacking Government contracts are going, why not get 'em?"

"Why not? Why waste time in doing anything else, all day long, but getting 'em?"

Mr. Pillivant drew from his inner breast pocket a vast gold casket of a cigar-case, opened it, and held it out towards his inhospitable host.

"Have a cigar? You needn't be afraid. They stand me in two hundred and fifty shillings a hundred and I get 'em wholesale. No?" Baltazar declined politely. "You're missing a good thing." He bit off the end of the one he had chosen, lit it with a fat wax vesta extracted from a minor gold casket and drew a few puffs.

"Funny sort of life you seem to be leading here, Mr. Baltazar. Dam' funny!"

"I perceive you have a keen sense of humour," said Baltazar.

Again the mocking stare of his cold, grey eyes abashed the unwelcome visitor, who filled in the ensuing silence by re-biting and re-lighting his half-crown cigar. The operation over:

"Lovely day, isn't it?" said he.

"So lovely, Mr. Pillivant," replied Baltazar, "that it would be selfish of me to do otherwise than leave you to the undisturbed enjoyment of it."

And, with a polite bow, he left Mr. Pillivant and walked, in a dignified way, into the house. Mr. Pillivant, conscious at last of the rejection of his friendly overtures, stared for a while, and then, sticking his

cigar at a truculent angle in his mouth, swaggered away across the moor.

"Quong Ho," said Baltazar, "when next you go to Water-End, it will be your duty to find a powerful and exceedingly nasty-tempered dog."

A fortnight afterwards Brutus was added to the establishment.

CHAPTER IV

THE life ordained by John Baltazar for Quong Ho and himself was one of unremitting toil, mental and physical. From the time of his uprising at six in the morning, when Quong Ho awakened him with tea (some chests of which he had brought with him from China), until midnight, there were few moments, save the after-dinner hour of literary indulgence, that he wasted in idle relaxation. The work of the house, that of steward, butler, valet, cook, parlourmaid, charwoman and laundress, together with the outdoor functions of groom, dairyman and bailiff, Quong Ho executed with the remarkable ease and despatch of the Chinaman accustomed from childhood to menial tasks. The cultivation of the barren land, the painful wheeling of barrow-loads of superficial soil from the moorland, the digging and the planting and the draining and the watering, were all done by John Baltazar himself. The hard exercise, some three or four hours a day, maintained him in the superb health that enabled him to carry out his studious programme. Of his eighteen waking hours he allotted roughly seven to physical things, eleven to intellectual pursuits. For Quong Ho this apportionment of time was inverted. That was the theoretic schedule. As a matter of fact, Quong Ho found more than seven hours a day for mathematical study and other intellectual development.

There was much that Baltazar had set himself to do

during his three years. First he must make up in mathematical output the loss of his wander-time in China. Now all the world understands the irresistible force that compels the poet, at last, to give form to long haunting dreams ; the need, also, of the astronomer to crystallize the results of his discoveries and formulate his epoch-making theories ; but the passion of the mathematician to do the same is not so easily comprehensible. For years Baltazar had dreamed of an exhaustive and monumental treatise on the Theory of Groups which would revolutionize the study of the higher mathematics, a gorgeous vision, the mere statement of which must leave the ordinary being cold and the first attempt at explanation petrify him with its icy unintelligibility. The dream was now in process of accomplishment. He had also to put into form fascinating adventures into the analytical geometry of the ghostly and unrealizable space of Four Dimensions. There, he was wont to assert, you entered the true Fairyland of mathematics. To all these labours he brought the enthusiasm of the poet or the astronomer. Another and a totally different sphere of activities absorbed much of his energy. In China he had assimilated a vast store of philosophical learning, with which equipment he prepared to re-edit many European versions of the Chinese classics misconceived through faulty erudition. He had brought from China stacks of rare manuscripts, piles of notes, materials for the life-work of any scholar. And, last, he had thrown himself with impetuous zeal into the intellectual training of Quong Ho.

The mutual attitude of the solitary pair was one of curious delicacy. As master and man they were league-sundered by the gulf of convention. As teacher and pupil they were drawn together into close intel-

lectual intimacy. It was the Chinaman's exquisite tact that simplified the situation for the direct and masterful Englishman. As a servant he scrupulously observed the decorum of the attendant—there never existed head butler in ducal mansion who could surpass his perfection of manner ; but as disciple he subtly raised himself to the plane of social equality, and gauged to a hair's-breadth the shade of familiar address warranted by the position.

" Quong Ho," said Baltazar one day at dinner, when the Chinaman had gone through the usual solemn farce of offering him Burgundy. " Your discretion is beyond the value of rubies. Never once have you remarked on the apparent vanity of this daily proceeding. Yet in your own mind you must have wondered at it."

" It is not for me to speculate on the reason for your honourable customs," said Quong Ho.

" Yet why do you think I cause myself to be offered wine every day only to refuse it ? "

" I suppose you desire to maintain, in the wilderness, the ceremonial etiquette of the English dinner-table. The wine in the bottle is but an adornment, like the flowers in the bowl."

" It pleases me that you should have come to such a conclusion," said Baltazar.

For the ceremony of the wine was linked with the causes that determined his sudden flight into solitude. He had promised Quong Ho to inform him of these causes ; but the fulfilment of the promise was hard to make. Sitting dishevelled on the bed in the little room at the top of the Savoy Hotel, he had thought disclosure to his servant to be a fitting part of the punishment he had meted out to himself. Later he repented ; especially when he perceived Quong Ho's

blank indifference. Still, a promise was a promise, and Baltazar not the man to shirk his obligations. On this particular occasion he thought it best to get the matter over.

"The conclusion is an honourable one on your part, Quong Ho," he continued, "but it is incorrect."

"I own, sir," replied Quong Ho, "that it is drawn from conjectural premises."

"It was over-indulgence in wine that made me set to myself this penalty of studious solitude," said Baltazar in Chinese. "By telling you this I redeem a promise. As to our daily custom, a weak man flies from temptation, a strong man keeps temptation at his elbow in order to defy it."

"In that way, honourable master, is merit acquired."

Quong Ho took away his empty plate and retired into the kitchen to fetch the next course. Baltazar leaned back in his chair and, his brow full of perplexity, yet breathed a sigh of relief.

"I've got it off my chest at last," he said half aloud. "But I wonder whether I've been a fool."

Quong Ho's subsequent demeanour could not enlighten him. Never again between them, save once, and that under the stress of a peculiar situation, was made the most veiled allusion to the subject, and day after day Quong Ho imperturbably performed with the Burgundy decanter the ceremonial etiquette of the English dinner-table.

It was only by glimpses like this that the man had ever revealed himself to his fellow-creatures. Glimpses like this one, fine and deliberate, to Quong Ho, and that one of long ago, passionate and self-destroying, to Marcelle Baring. To neither did he accord more than a glimpse. To neither did he show himself

on a razor-edged ledge with the abyss on one side and salvation on the other. Another touch of the girl's lips would have sent them both into what the sensitive and honourable gentleman would have called the abyss. Perhaps, if she had been older, a woman, one tuned to the pulsating responsibilities of life, he might have faced things with her. Who knows? To his direct mind the casuistical point did not occur. Actualities alone concerned him. She was so delicate and fragrant a flower of girlhood. His for the plucking. . . . When he regained his college rooms, that far-off summer afternoon, he was as a man torn by devils. Love her? He would be torn in pieces rather than that her exquisite foot should be bruised against a stone. Love her? With her soft voice, her maddening Madonna face, her kind eyes, her tremulous mouth? Love her? The wonder of wonders possessed of the power to divine his inmost thoughts, to touch with magically healing fingers all the aching wounds in his soul, to envelop him body and mind and spirit in a network of a myriad fairy tendrils? Love her? God knows he did.

But she was a child—and a child can forget—at the worst retain a not ungracious memory. But he was a man, on the verge of hideous villainy. And he stood in his college room, surrounded by all that symbolized the intellectual life that up to then had been the meaning of his existence, and he looked around.

"The whole lot will have to go to blazes," said he.

And at that moment he cut the Gordian knot.

His wife? She hated him: why, he could not tell; but she missed few opportunities of showing her rancour. He had striven desperately to win her esteem, at the cost of much swallowed pride. Some

months had passed since the last pitiable reconciliation. . . . Why had he married her? It had not been for lack of warning. Perhaps the very traducing of her had spurred him on. She was so fair and fragile, so pathetic in her widowhood. A clamour of the senses, a prompting of chivalry, and the thing was done. And she, widow of a phlegmatic don of Trinity, living in Cambridge, was perhaps carried away by the glamour surrounding the coming man in that tiny, academic world.

"I wish you were dead," were the last words he had heard her utter. He snapped his fingers. She could have her desire.

Baltazar packed his bag with necessaries, told his gyp that business called him to London for some days, and left Cambridge for ever. A month afterwards he was on his way, under an assumed name, to China.

The act of a fool perhaps. But has not one who knew called him the Fool of Genius? Anyhow, he had the courage and the wit to cut his life off clean. The life of John Baltazar of Cambridge and that of James Burden who, having landed at Shanghai, spent so many adventurous years in the heart of China, might have been lived by two individuals who had never heard of each other. That disappearance from England was the first start, the consequence of the first violent fit. The first that mattered.

But there had been others. To one, his mind went back even as he asked himself whether his confession to Quong Ho had been the proceeding of an idiot. It had to do with the self-same subject of that confession. The period went back to his last undergraduate term, when he was as certain of being Senior Wrangler as a Cardinal of being the best theologian in a scratch company of parish priests. Carrying on

to the beginning of term an end of vacation revel, Baltazar took to evil courses. The slander which, reported to young Godfrey Baltazar, Marcelle Baring had so vehemently denied, had its basis in truth. He had discovered alcohol, and for a time plunged with his whole-souled fervour into his discovery. Then, one Spooner, the next in the Tripos running, a man living entirely on his scholarships, a mild and pallid man of no physical value, whom the lusty Baltazar, after the way of vivid and immature young men, despised, had the grand audacity to call on him and expostulate with him on his excesses. Baltazar listened breathless. The fellow ought to be going round with a show of freaks. He told him so. Spooner waved aside the proposition and went on with his main argument.

"You have every right to be Senior. There's not one of us in it with you. But, if you go on playing the fool like this, anything may happen."

"That's all to your personal advantage, my dear good missionary," said Baltazar.

"You don't seem to understand why I've come here," replied Spooner. "I don't want to be Senior just because a man who's infinitely better than I is a drunken sot."

And they talked and bandied words a little, and then Baltazar saw himself face to face with an exquisite soul. He gripped the lean shoulders of the undeveloped, spectacled young man with his big hands.

"I swear to God," said he, "that I'll not touch a drop of alcohol for the next five years."

But he also swore to himself an oath of which Spooner was ignorant. He swore that Spooner should be Senior. And he kept both vows. In the last day's Problem Paper he deliberately sacrificed himself. As a matter of fact he just overdid it, for, to the

mystification of all concerned in the Tripos, he was placed third. But Spooner had the coveted distinction. The Tripos over, everything fell before Baltazar, and he was acknowledged the supreme mathematician of his year, and, in the course of time, the greatest of his generation.

The difficulty, owing to its episodical character, of presenting the early career of Baltazar, thus finds illustration. One might go back to schoolboy days and point to lapses from grace, followed by similar swift and ruthless decisions. To catalogue them all would require the patient tediousness of a formal biography. Apart from such a process, his life up to his flight into the moorland wilderness can best be pictured by a series of flashes.

A sudden disgust with China and an overwhelming nostalgia for the sweeter political life of England drove him home after eighteen years. The greater part of the time he had spent in the impenetrable heart of the vast country, speaking many dialects as well as the classical Wen Li of the learned, an encyclopædia of erudition, saturated with intimate knowledge of Chinese custom and observance, a Chinaman in all but physical appearance, dressing, living, acting and accepted universally as a Chinaman, prospering as a Chinaman, too, in financial undertakings. It was old China that he entered, a land stable in its peculiar civilization which, in spite of many traditional oppressions and time-sanctioned cruelties, had its fascination and grace —the gift to a Mandarin of a precious and much-coveted ancient manuscript had purchased the life of a boy, Li Quong Ho, condemned to elaborate death for a venial offence, the transaction being carried out in an atmosphere of high refinement, and scented tea

served and drunk with exquisite punctilio. It was old China that he had learned to love, with its sense of beauty, its reverence for learning, its profound ethical philosophy. But it was a new China, convulsed with new ideas, bloodthirsty, treacherous, unstable to maddening point, that he had quitted in his sudden and determined way.

For eighteen years, in the interior of China, he had lived remote from European politics. He had sunk himself in the lore, and identified himself with the interests, of that ancient land. With no correspondence, beyond the reach of newspapers, he all but forgot the existence of Europe. Meeting his fellow-countrymen on the homeward voyage, he shunned them, partly through shyness, partly through distaste for the brusqueness of their manners, the high pitch of their voices, their colossal ignorance of the country with which they boasted such contemptuous familiarity, the narrowness of their outlook, the petty materialism of their conversation. He held himself aloof, longing for the real England at the end of the voyage.

In London, the loneliest soul in the great city, he set himself to pick up the threads of the life around him. He walked the familiar and unwelcoming streets, at first dazed by the motor traction, then bewildered by evidences of the luxury which eighteen years of decadence had engendered. He visited new palaces of entertainment and came away wondering. In fashionable supper-rooms he saw the flower of the land dancing to what, as a scholar, he knew to be West African sexual rhythms. He could not understand. What were they doing, or trying to do? He would sit lonely at a table, a formally ordered drink before him, at one of these great public haunts, and try to get the key to the mystery. The decay of manners offended

him. He discounted the fact that he had lived so many intense years in the land of sacred ceremonial ; he wiped that out of his mind, and recalled the standard of his own youth. The exiguity of feminine apparel shocked his unaccustomed eyes ; in many cases nothing from waist up but a sort of low palisade, scarcely concealing the bust. Was he not mistaken ? Was this not rather the scum than the flower of modern England ? But at neighbouring tables he had overheard attention being directed to bearers of proud and historic names. Then he asked himself the question : had he frequented such places eighteen years ago ? Had they not been outside the sphere of his narrow academic life ? He desired to judge justly. When did he leave England ? In 1896. And his bachelor days, with their joyous London jaunts, had ended in 1894. There was no such social life then : if there had been, he would have heard of it. In the afternoons, too, these young men and maidens danced their weird dances.

Outside, the land was a-clamour with the doings of a sterner sisterhood. Processions, mass meetings, virago riotings, picture slashings, incendiarism, bombs, formed the features of their astounding crusade. The newspapers, beyond the recounting of facts, with vivid descriptions of sensational scenes, gave him little information as to the philosophy of the movement. Politically the country seemed to be in a state of chaotic turmoil. Persons holding high office were publicly accused of corrupt financial practices. Parliament wrangled fiercely with the Army over an *opéra bouffe* condition of Irish affairs. Beneath all this Labour uttered volcanic threatenings. Subversive ideas, new to him, such as syndicalism, were in the air. Unintelligible criticisms of picture exhibi-

tions urged his curious steps to the indicated galleries, where he came upon canvases that made his brain reel. A new Rip Van Winkle, he had awakened to a mad world, a world even more perilously unstable than the China which he had left.

The solitary scholar found himself disastrously out of sympathy with it all. He had planned to give himself a month's holiday in London before settling down, in some quiet and comfortable suburb, to the many years' work that lay before him on the materials he had brought from China. He had formed no intention whatever of cutting himself off from communion with his fellow-men. Indeed, he meant, as soon as he could rid himself of the complications of his assumed name, to proclaim himself unobtrusively to the world as John Baltazar. Before coming finally to this decision, however, he must learn what had become of his wife, as he had no desire to play the disconcerting part of a tactless Enoch Arden. His first step on arriving at London had been to institute, through a firm of solicitors, discreet inquiries. He learned that his wife had been dead for thirteen years. He was at liberty to become John Baltazar again as soon as he liked. But in London, as James Burden, he stayed at the Savoy Hotel, a bewildered and disillusioned spectator of the modern world.

How did the catastrophe happen? Thinking over it, as he often thought with shivers of disgust, in his moorland retreat, he could scarcely give an answer. Only once, since his interview with the audacious Spooner, had he given way to an overmastering impulse—and that was on his journey out to Shanghai. Anti-climax, in the shape of sudden storm and seasickness, cured him, and he vowed total abstinence all the time he should be in China; and he kept his

vow. Perhaps, here in London, unaccustomed idleness and his disgust-filled loneliness drove him gradually and insensibly to the consolation of alcohol. The odd drinks during the day increased in number. He viewed a rosier London after a quart of old Burgundy at dinner. To sit in a crowded cosmopolitan café became his evening amusement, and the continuous consumption of brandies and soda aided indulgent observation. He had given himself his month's holiday, and he meant to have it, no matter how joyless and unsympathetic was the holiday atmosphere. Now and then, in these popular resorts he picked casual acquaintanceship with a neighbour. He had the gift of making his companion's conversation intelligent and interesting. On these occasions he drank less.

But one solitary night intoxication for the first time overcame him. He realized it with a feeling of anger. The lights were just being lowered. He ordered a double liqueur brandy, in the crazy assurance that it would pull him together. Of what happened afterwards he had little memory. In the crowded street some one laid hold of him and, resentful of attack, he turned and smote his supporter. To complete the outrage, a policeman handled him roughly, a proceeding which he also violently resented. Then a whirl of lights and darkness and lights again, and strange faces and once more darkness absolute and final, until he awoke and found himself sober and shivering in a police cell. A few hours afterwards, James Burden, of no occupation, living at the Savoy Hotel, was fined forty shillings or a month for being drunk and disorderly in Leicester Square.

If it had been a magnificent folly, a royal debauch, a voluptuous orgy of roses and wine and laughter and

song and the pulsating lustiness of life, the *dulce periculum* of the follower of the Lenæan one brow-bound with green vine-leaves, he might have held himself in some measure excused. He had made no vow, he had no reason, to spurn the joyousness of existence. He was a man of racing blood, with claim and right to the gladness of physical things. But this sordid, solitary bout with its end of vulgarity and degradation, filled him with a horror almost maddening in its fierceness. His soul shrivelled at the ghastly humiliation. That it should come upon him ; him, John Baltazar, with half a century of clean life behind him ; him, John Baltazar, the man who had compelled high honour for intellect and character from his childhood days, at a Public School, at the University, as an unknown and prejudice-surrounded foreigner in the strangest of alien lands ; that it should come upon him seemed like a phantasma or a hideous dream.

And then it fell that he once more cut the Gordian knot. He would fly from a world in which he had proved himself not fit to live cleanly, with all the less reluctance because he had found it incomprehensible and unattractive. And sitting dishevelled on the bed, he informed Quong Ho of his decision. As soon as he had cleansed himself from the soil of the awful night, he left the Savoy and the dishonoured name of James Burden for ever, and took rooms at another hotel for the night as John Baltazar. The next day he threw himself vehemently into the quest of a hermitage. He remembered a desolate waste of moorland through which on a walking tour he had rambled in his undergraduate days.

" It may be, Quong Ho," said he, " that it is built over with picture palaces and swarming with tango-

dancers. Any conceivable happening to England during the last twenty years is possible. But we'll go and see."

"I am unacquainted, sir," replied Quong Ho, "with the dancers you mention; but I have visited picture palaces during the fortnight we have spent in your wonderful country, and, rightly exercised, the cinematograph strikes me as being the most marvellous vehicle for the propaganda of civilization that the world has seen."

"Quong Ho," said Baltazar, "it is not in our contract to care one little tuppenny damn for the propaganda of civilization. You're not going to waste your time at one of those futile and ill-conceived, although ingenious, entertainments for the next three years. If the particular region I have in view is not satisfactory, we shall find another."

Presently he added, in a tone of compunction—he was dressing while Quong Ho packed:

"I'm sorry I've had to cut short the time I intended you to have in London. I badly wanted you to have some general idea of it."

"Sir," replied Quong Ho, "without wishing to boast, I have grasped London. I could find my way blindfolded from here to the Tower, the House of Parliaments, the North End Road, Fulham, and that imperishable objective record of your honourable nation's history, the museum of Madame Tussaud."

"All the points you have mentioned, Quong Ho," said Baltazar, "are of undoubted value—except the North End Road, Fulham. What the devil could you find of interest in that drab region of nowhere?"

Quong Ho's usually smiling and mobile face became an expressionless mask.

"It marked the end of my peregrination in that direction," he replied.

" It strikes me," said Baltazar, " that it's time you peregrinated to a more God-swept and intellectual atmosphere."

Three weeks afterwards they took up their residence at Spendale Farm.

CHAPTER V

BALTAZAR had lived on the moor in peace and comfort for nearly a year when he received his first unsolicited communication from the outside world, in the shape of a long, cheap envelope, headed "On His Majesty's Service," and containing Income Tax assessment forms. For a moment he wondered how the representatives of His Majesty had managed to ferret him out in his retreat.

"It's a vile country," said he to Quong Ho, who had handed him the letter on returning from his weekly visit to the town. "It's a pettifogging, police-ridden land, where a man, if he so chooses, can't bury himself decently. I'm sure the King is not aware of this unwarranted interference with the liberty of one of the most self-effacing of his subjects."

"My mind was in half," replied Quong Ho, "to destroy the missive which I conjectured would cause you annoyance."

"It's a good thing you didn't. The King is an amiable gentleman, but the High Mandarins from whom this proceeds are not to be trifled with." He glanced through the papers. "It is well," said he, with a sigh of relief. "The High Mandarins around the Throne are as yet ignorant of my whereabouts; but if I refused to obey this invitation, they would soon learn it. It is a pestilential minor official in the vicinity who for the sake of money—it's his dis-

gusting mode of livelihood—has violated my solitude."

"In the New China," said Quong Ho, "we hope to do away with the bureaucracy, which is a parasite on civilization."

"You won't do it," said Baltazar. "In the New Jerusalem—by which we mean the Kingdom of Heaven—there is a Recording Angel, and you may bet your boots he has got his staff of officials who write minutes and fill up forms all Eternity long."

"Perfection," remarked Quong Ho, "is to be found neither in this world nor the next, but only in that harmonious principle of the soul which is termed *li* in the Confucian philosophy."

"Quong Ho," said Baltazar in Chinese, "your wisdom befits rather the honourable white beard of the teacher than the smooth-shaven chin of the pupil of five-and-twenty."

Quong Ho bowed respectfully at the compliment and withdrew.

"Confound the Income Tax!" said Baltazar, looking through the papers. He had completely forgotten his liability. The sudden reminder vexed him. Of course he must pay; but his income being exclusively derived from investments, all of which were taxed at the source before the dividend warrants were paid automatically into his account at his bankers, why should he be worried? He resented the intrusion on his privacy.

A week later Quong Ho posted the form in the ironically provided, penny-saving official envelope, and Baltazar dismissed the incident from his mind.

When some time afterwards his assessment paper arrived, it caused him some astonishment. He cast his memory back twenty years. In 1896 the Income Tax, if he remembered rightly, was inconsiderable,

some sixpence in the pound. Now it was half a crown. He filled up the form, an easy task, thinking less than ever of the social condition of Modern England ; such high direct taxation could only mean the desperate financial straits of a decadent country. Well, as far as he was concerned, the loss of one-eighth of his income did not matter. The initial expenses of his installation at Spendale Farm over, he scarcely spent a third of it.

The next disturbing document that found its way to Spendale Farm contained a searching series of questions, headed "National Registration."

"I am ceasing to regard England as a fit place to live in," said he, with some petulance. "This is Mandarinism run riot."

A few weeks afterwards he received a neat little card folded in two, on the outside of which was printed a vile semblance of the Royal Coat of Arms and "National Registration Act, 1915," and inside a certificate of the Registration of (*a*) John Baltazar, (*b*) Philosophical Investigator—for as such had he irritably described himself—(*c*) of Spendale Farm, Water-End. There was a space for the signature of Holder, and below it in great capitals "God Save the King." On the back were directions as to change of address.

"God knows what's coming over the country," said he. "It appears that a free-born Englishman has got to carry about his police papers, as people have to do in disgusting countries like Germany and Russia. What about you, Quong Ho ? Have you got a pretty little document like this ? "

"I am registered as an alien," replied Quong Ho.

"It seems to me," said Baltazar, "that when I

used to gas to you about our free British institutions I was nothing but an ignorant liar."

"By no means, sir," replied Quong Ho politely. "The keynote of the modern world is change. What was true of material things yesterday is a lie to-day."

"How did you discover that?"

"I assume the little town of Water-End to be but a microcosm of Great Britain."

"Why," laughed Baltazar, "what signs of change do you see there?"

Quong Ho remained for a moment silent, and his face assumed its Oriental impassivity. If he reported to his master the astounding events that were taking place, even at Water-End, whose quiet High Street was a-bustle with newly fledged soldiery from the moorland camp three miles on the further side, he would not only risk the dissolution of the establishment, but would be guilty of filial disobedience, which was impiety. And the European War, after all, how could it concern him, Li Quong Ho? Perhaps, too, his master, foreseeing the tempest, particularly desired to take shelter and hear nothing at all about it. He was fortunate enough, however, to find a perfectly true reply to Baltazar's question. He smiled in some relief; for an intellectual Chinaman, trained in the lofty morality of the Chinese classics, does not willingly lie.

"It is a woman and not a man who now delivers the letters in Water-End."

Baltazar continued to laugh: "They'll be driving the motor-cars soon."

"I've seen them doing it," said Quong Ho.

"I'm not surprised," said his master. "They were tending that way a year ago. These new women are out for the devirilization of man. Perhaps by this

time they're in Parliament, passing firework legislation and playing the devil with all our laws and customs. You haven't yet heard, by any chance, whether the occupation of monthly nursing is confined exclusively to the male sex?"

"The enactment, if such there be," replied Quong Ho solemnly, "is not, to my knowledge, in force in this remote locality."

"Let us thank the gods, Quong Ho," said Baltazar, "that we're out of this feminist hurly-burly. The little I saw of the movement was antipathetic to my philosophy of life. A society in which women regard the bearing of children as a physical accident of no account, and deny the responsibilities which such an event entails, must be doomed to decay, or, at the best, to bitter disillusionment. The more I hear of contemporary England the less I like it. It seems to be woman-ridden; curiously enough by two camps in apparent opposition, but in reality waging joint warfare on man. The world has never yet beheld such a sex campaign. One section demands luxury beyond the dreams of Byzantium at its rottenest, and the other claims supreme political power."

"It is well, sir," said Quong Ho, "that you repudiated the imbecile suggestion of the House Agent to the effect that you should employ a woman housekeeper of mature age to superintend this establishment."

"It is lucky for you, Quong Ho, that I did," grinned Baltazar. "She would have made you sit up."

Quong Ho, with clasped hands and lowered head, respectfully asserted himself. "If I do not sit up sufficiently for your satisfaction, sir, it is for you to reprimand me."

"I only spoke in jest, Quong Ho," said Baltazar. "Our Western humour is rather subtle."

"I will make a note of it," replied Quong Ho.

"By such notation and accumulation of detail one gathers knowledge," said Baltazar. "By co-ordination one acquires wisdom. Continue on this, the only path of philosophy, and your old age will be blessed. In the meantime, please keep your observations of changes at Water-End to yourself."

"Obedience to your honourable commands, my master," replied Quong Ho, in Chinese, "is the sacred duty of this entirely inconsiderable person. But may one so inferior as myself humbly remind your illustrious greatness that it was you who originally propounded to me a question which I was bound to answer."

"The fact that I did so," replied Baltazar, "you may note as an instance of the human fallibility of the sublimest minds. Fear not but that I will profit by your lesson."

He waved a dismissing hand. Quong Ho bowed with the perfect ceremonial of pupil taking leave of master and retired. Baltazar threw himself into his arm-chair and laughed aloud.

"You're a joy, Quong Ho. A perfect joy. A museum specimen of a joy."

So, while Baltazar delighted in the unhumorous literalness of the Chinaman, it never occurred to him that he was the dupe of the unhumorous literalness of the Chinaman's fidelity; that while he was inveighing against speculative phenomena of an ill-understood movement, the trumpet of war had transformed that movement into an apotheosis of feminine effort of which Quong Ho, keenly intellectual, was perfectly well aware; and that it was only by the pious grace

of his pupil and servant that he lived a day in his fool's paradise.

When Quong Ho, a week afterwards, brought him his meagre mail, he angrily crushed in his fist and threw aside the enclosure of the first envelope which he had opened.

"I'm hanged if this isn't a begging circular! It's infernal impudence! It's an intolerable outrage on one's personal liberty. Here, Quong Ho!"—he swept the remainder of the mail into the Chinaman's hand. "Don't let me be worried with any more letters. I've come down here to be quiet and not to be badgered. If there are bills to pay, make out the cheques and I'll sign them. If there are circulars, throw them away. About anything else use your discretion."

"I will exactly execute your orders," replied Quong Ho.

Thus Baltazar finally severed relations between himself and the outside world. Quong Ho acted the perfect Private Secretary. The only letters presented to his master for perusal were rare business communications from booksellers instructed to purchase some out-of-the-way and possibly expensive book. Circular letters, containing appeals for subscriptions, which poured in, as soon as Baltazar's name eventually found its way on the address-lists of the neighbourhood, Quong Ho conscientiously destroyed. Using his discretion, he withheld letters from the Bank inviting investments in War Loans. Such, in his opinion, were further intrusions on the sacred privacy of his master. And thus the weeks and months passed by; and Quong Ho, in touch with even such an outpost of civilization as the tiny moorland town and bringing to that contact the most highly trained incuriosity, could not avoid gathering the current tidings of the

vast world conflict ; but, faithful to his commands, he said never a word to Baltazar, gave never a hint of the stupendous convulsion in which the world was involved. And while his master, serene doctrinaire, discoursed on the political science of the nineties, now being blown to smithereens by German guns, he maintained the reverential attitude of the disciple, drinking in as gospel truth the wisdom of his inspired teacher.

One evening, when Baltazar had praised the clear solution of certain problems which he had set in Differential Equations, and prophesied a glorious career for the most brilliant mathematician China had ever produced, Quong Ho, after gratefully acknowledging the encomium, said :

" If you will forgive my indiscretion, I should like to ask a question. Why is it, sir, that you, who take such great interest in the future—for example, my inconsiderable and negligible prospects, and the benefits that will accrue to humanity on the publication of the thought-shaking results of your own profound researches, should be so indifferent to the present condition of the world ? "

" For the simple reason, my good fellow," replied Baltazar, " that, from what I have observed, the present condition of mankind—from China to Peru, as your newly found friend Dr. Johnson says—is putrescent. The best way in which we can serve mankind is to do what we're doing now—to provide for the intellectual development of the future generation."

" The proposition is unanswerable," said Quong Ho. " But suppose, sir, for the sake of argument, that a philosophic observation of the civilized world as it is should result in the conclusion that, in the English

idiom, it is proceeding fast to the devils—what is the duty of the man of high morality?"

"To let it go slap-dash," said Baltazar. "The faster and surer, the better. For then the sooner will the eternal rhythm, the eternal principle of balance, assert itself. When a society is rushing down to Gadarene suicide——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," interrupted the alert Quong Ho. "Gad—I do not understand the word."

"Read the Gospel according to St. Mark to-morrow. You've heard of St. Mark?"

"You might as well ask me, sir, if I had heard of Confucius or Homer, or the immortal Todhunter of my childhood."

Baltazar rubbed his brown thatch and turned his luminous grey eyes on his disciple.

"The immensity of your purview, Quong Ho, is only equalled by your lightning perception of landmarks. Anyhow, read St. Mark over again, and tell me your opinion of the swine of Gadara. For the moment, I'd have you know that you've interrupted my argument. I was saying that if everything's going to the devil—that's the correct idiom—not proceeding to devils——"

"May I make a note of it?" said Quong Ho, scribbling the phrase across his mathematical manuscript.

Baltazar rose from his chair by the long deal table and relit his pipe over the chimney of a lamp.

"You've put me out. What the blazes were we talking about?"

"The present world condition," replied Quong Ho.

"Then I assert," said Baltazar, "that the present state of the world is rotten. It's no place for intel-

lectual reformers like you and me. What are the words of Confucius known to every schoolboy? '*With sincerity and truth unite a desire for self-culture. Lay down your life rather than quit the path of virtue. Enter not a state which is tottering to its fall. When Law obtains in the Empire, let yourself be seen: when lawlessness reigns, retire into obscurity.*' "

"But supposing," persisted Quong Ho, "the state of the devil-driven world is of vital interest?"

"It can be of vital interest only to those hurtling down to destruction. To us, who have retired into the obscure aloofness recommended by the great philosopher, it can be of no possible concern."

"It is well," said Quong Ho.

"I know it is," remarked Baltazar, with a yawn. "Another night let us have a slightly more intelligent conversation."

Quong Ho retired, his conscience finally set at rest. After all, was not his master right? What could he do of any use in the world rudely at war? Was he not serving the truest interests of humanity by retiring at this juncture and devoting the harvest of his great learning to a future generation?

"Soldiers," said Quong Ho the next day, looking into the unspeculative topaz eyes of the goat which he had been milking, "are as numerous as the sands of the desert, and politicians as the mosquitoes in a swamp; they are swept away and the world misses them not; but philosophers are rare, and the loss of one of them is a supreme world calamity."

"Baa-a-a!" said the goat.

"I perceive that you too have wisdom," said Quong Ho. "You appreciate the privilege of living under the same roof as the illustrious Baltazar."

He burst into an unaccustomed laugh. Conver-

sation with a goat appealed to his prim sense of humour. But all the same, he expressed his own deeply-rooted conviction. To the keen-brained young Chinaman, Baltazar appeared as a man of stupendous intellectual force. His knowledge of the abstract sciences of the Western world would have commanded his respect; but his vast Chinese erudition, acknowledged with admiration by Mandarins and scholars and other Great Ones of China, gave Quong Ho cause for a veneration reaching almost to idolatry.

Also Baltazar, for all his patriarchal years, earned his pupil's respect as a man of marvellous muscle and endurance. During the winter, when the inclemency of the weather forbade agricultural pursuits—and on that moorland waste the weather abandoned itself to every capricious devildom within meteorological possibilities—Baltazar, having ordered a set of gloves from London, gave boxing lessons to his disciple. At first Quong Ho was shocked. How could so contemptible a person as he even make a pretence of smiting the highly honourable face of his master? Baltazar bade him try. He would give him an hour's extra private tuition for every hit. And Quong Ho, encouraged by so splendid a prize, tried, at first diffidently, then earnestly, then zealously, then desperately, then bald-headedly, but never a wild blow could pass the easy guard of his smiling master.

"You see, Quong Ho, it's a science," said Baltazar. "Now I'm going to hit you." And he feinted and struck out with his left and sent his disciple swinging across the room. "It is also a game," he added, holding up his hand, "because what I have just done did not hurt you in the least."

Quong Ho rubbed his jaw. "It was like the kiss of a butterfly," said he.

"Here endeth the First Lesson," said Baltazar. "The English etiquette now requires that we should shake hands."

When they had gone through the formality, Baltazar continued :

"You of all non-English people oughtn't to be astonished. Did not the same ceremony exist in your country over two thousand years ago? Is it not referred to in the Analects?"

"Sir," said the breathless and perspiring Quong Ho, "I have unworthily forgotten."

"Did not the Master say : '*The true gentleman is never contentious. If a spirit of rivalry is anywhere unavoidable, it is at a shooting-match. Yet even here he courteously salutes his opponents before taking up his position*'—we ought to have shaken hands before starting, but we'll do it next time—'*and again when, having lost, he retires to drink the forfeit-cup*'—your forfeit-cup being the loss of the extra hours of tuition. '*So that even when competing, he remains a true gentleman.*'"

"I remember now," said Quong Ho.

"I'm glad you do," replied Baltazar. "That is the lofty spirit in which we shall continue this exceedingly health-giving science and pastime."

And they continued. The young Chinaman—lithe, hard, physically perfect, little more than half the age of his tutor—devoted himself, with his Chinese assiduity, to the mastery of the fascinating art, and succeeded eventually in giving Baltazar most interesting encounters ; he realized that fierce blows planted on venerable features were taken, nay, applauded, in the spirit of the Confucian gentleman ; he also accepted in the same gentlemanly way the hammering that he invariably received. It was after some months

of this training, when he was able to discount merely superior science, that he bowed down before Baltazar not only as before an intellect, but as before a marvellous physical man.

There came a truce, however—the following winter—when Baltazar, wise in his elderly generation, foresaw the inevitable supremacy of youth, and ordered new toys from London—foils, masks and fencing jackets. The gloves mouldered in a broken-down potting-shed, and Quong Ho again started, as a tyro, to learn a new athletic accomplishment. Thus in his disciple's sound body Baltazar contrived to maintain a sound and humble mind. He knew that he was held in deep respect by Quong Ho. But it never occurred to his careless mind that Quong Ho regarded him as a kind of god. He accepted the homage as a matter of course.

In these idyllic conditions John Baltazar accounted himself serenely happy. His scholarly solitude was undisturbed by the windy ways of men or the windy ways of moorland nature. The former spent themselves before reaching him ; at the latter he snapped his fingers. What to him was the seasons' difference ? So absorbed was he in his work, so circumscribed in his walled enclosure beyond which he seldom set foot, that he barely even noticed the hourly change on the sensitive face of the moor. And season followed season, and the piles of manuscript, exquisitely corrected for the printer, grew in height, and Quong Ho assimilated Higher Mathematics as though it were rice ; and everything was for the best in the best of all possible little intellectual worlds.

CHAPTER VI

SUCH, as far as a few strokes can picture him, was John Baltazar at the time when his unsuspected son lay footless in the convalescent home and discussed with Marcelle Baring the mystery of his existence. A man of many failings, many intolerances, of some ruthlessness. A man both sensitive and hard; both bold and shrinking; with the traditional habits of the ostrich and the heart of a lion. A man apparently given to extravagances of caprice; and yet remaining always constant to himself, preserving also throughout his strange career a perfect unity of character. Perhaps, regarding him from another point of view, his detractors may say that he loved to play to himself as audience and, further, put that audience in the gallery. Why not? It is in the essence of human consciousness that a man must, in some measure, be an actor to himself. The degree depends on the human equation. Dumas *fils* once said of his immortal semi-mulatto father: "He is quite capable of getting up behind his own carriage, in order to persuade people that he keeps a black footman." A savage epigram. But it would have been a deeper truth if he had said that the wonder of a man who was his father, was capable of doing it, in order to persuade himself that he kept a black footman. The more we limit the audience to the man himself, the more we love him. The more human does the vivid creature appear to

us. If Baltazar played to that audience of one, he had many illustrious colleagues. If, again, his method was melodramatic, it at least had breadth. It dealt with big issues in a broad and simple way. . . .

"That's what I love about the three great systems of Chinese ethics," he would declare. "There's no damned subtlety about them. You accept the various propositions or you don't. There are no *homoousian* and *homoiousian* conflicts, and such-like rubbish, that have torn Western thought to ribbons for over a thousand years. In China you go straight to the heart of truth. All the subtlety lies, Quong Ho, in the correct interpretation of your appalling but fascinating script."

This was a rough profession of faith, almost an analysis of character. The intellect of the mathematician delighted in the process of arriving at exactness of statement, but at the same time that statement's philosophic simplicity appealed to a nature fundamentally simple.

He abhorred complications. That was his weakness. He claimed, unphilosophically, the absolute. Hence the abandonment of his academical career, involving at the same time the merciless abandonment of his wife. Hence the clean cut of his career in China, where a little supple coquetting with political corruption would have brought him great wealth and power. Hence the impenetrable wall he had now contrived between himself and the rest of mankind. He had no power of compromise.

Thus an attempt has been made to answer the question which Marcelle Baring vainly put to herself that sleepless night on her return from London, when a boy's artless admiration had opened springs of sentiment which she had thought deliberately sealed for

ever ; the question asked by Godfrey Baltazar ; the same question which almost simultaneously John Baltazar put to himself, while leaning over the gate in the glory of the moorland sunset ; which, in a wistful, speculative way, he continued to put to himself after Quong Ho, with new lights on Elliptic Functions and the philosophy of Lao Tze and the Ethics of Love—for the severe lesson in mathematics was always followed by an hour's improving conversation on general matters—had retired for the night, leaving him to his last pipe and his last spell of work. But the discussion on the Ethics of Love disturbed his more studious thought and brought back the question which a few hours before had idly flitted across his brain.

Quong Ho had said, somewhat diffidently, in his own language :

" Master, may this inconsiderable person seek the solution of an intimate problem from one who is a supreme authority on all things concerning human conduct ? "

" Fire away," said Baltazar in English.

" Thank you, sir ; I will proceed to fire. When I left China, I was a young man of no account, the son of peasants long since defunct, your body-servant, almost your slave, because you purchased my life."

" We can stow all that," said Baltazar.

" With your honourable permission, by no means. I was reckoned in Chen Chow only as a hopper of clods——"

" Eh ? Oh, yes. Go on," smiled Baltazar.

" I saw the daughter of Fung Yu, the gardener of the palace——"

" I remember the old villain. He had a daughter ? "

" There were negotiations in progress," Quong Ho went on. " The young woman was eminently desir-

able. She was virtuous and obedient, and not devoid of physical attractiveness. When I followed you, sir, from China, I left the affair between myself and Fung Yu in a state of suspended animation."

"You mean Fung Yu's daughter? In our more brutal idiom it comes to this—that you're in love with a little girl in China—and she possibly with you—and you've run away and don't know what the devil to do."

"Her feelings," replied Quong Ho calmly, "do not concern me. I doubt whether she has any of sentimental importance. It is with my own honourable conduct that I am preoccupied. I left China a person to whom Fung Yu would condescend: I return as a personage of high intellectual repute. I shall be able to seek a bride of a far higher social position than the daughter of Fung Yu. That is not all. My study of English literature has given me new conceptions of the intellectual companionship of married life. In the New China there are certainly young girls of high educational standard, among whom I might find one who could understand what I was talking about when I spoke of such philosophical topics as interested me. The point that, as a very young and humble man, I wish to submit to your infallible wisdom, for my guidance, is this: am I bound, as an honourable fellow, to marry, in Old China, the flower-like but cabbage-ignorant daughter of Fung Yu, the gardener, or am I justified in cutting the Rubicon and seeking in the New China for a real helpmate?"

"Before proceeding," replied Baltazar, with the bantering light in his grey eyes that Quong Ho could never interpret, "will you make a note for a conversation to-morrow on Mixture of Metaphors?" Quong Ho produced his notebook. "Yes, just that entry.

Mixture of Metaphors. Good," said he, when the methodical young Chinaman had obeyed. "Side issues, like that, have their great importance; but they must be followed after the main course has been traversed. The whole point of the matter is: how far have you committed yourself with the girl?"

Quong Ho started back in his straight-backed wooden chair—they were still side by side at the lamp-lit centre of the long deal table—and held up his hands.

"Committed myself? Oh, no. The only time I ever addressed her was on one occasion when I relieved her of the burden of a vessel of water from the well to her house. But I have spoken very seriously to Fung Yu."

"Fung Yu can go to blazes," said Baltazar.

Quong Ho smiled. "I alone could give evidence that would condemn him to a perpetuity of punishment."

"So could I," cried Baltazar. "Graft! If Tammany Hall really wanted to know how to do things, it ought to sit like a little child at the feet of a high-class Mandarin's head gardener. Fung Yu's the real thing."

"He is a corrupt personality," said Quong Ho.

"Therefore," replied Baltazar, "he is not the kind of person with whom an honourable man should seek alliance. As to the lady, her young affections are obviously unblighted, and very possibly by this time she is married and the mother of twins. My advice is to dismiss Fung Yu and his flower-like yet cabbage-ignorant daughter for ever from your mind."

"I shall follow your gracious counsel," replied Quong Ho. And the intimate conversation ended.

But it hung around the thoughts of Baltazar for

the rest of the night. Quong Ho was young. Quong Ho had looked upon a daughter of men and found her fair. In his Chinese self-repressing way he had had his romance. Now it was over. He pitied Quong Ho. Yet, after a year or so of probation, the young man, lusty in his youth and confident in his future, would return to his native land heart-whole, with all the romance of life still before him—whilst he, Baltazar, would re-enter a world from which all such things were blotted out for ever. For what of romance could lie before a man of fifty—one who had lost all touch with women and women's ways? For the first time a fear of loneliness sent a shiver through him. It was not natural for a man to have neither wife nor child. It was but half an existence; a deliberate spurning of duties and glories and fulfilled achievement. And his own one romance? Had he been justified in destroying its gossamer web? It was all very long ago; but the beauty of it lingered exquisite in his heart. Had he been a mere fool? Were the results to him and to her worth the sacrifice? And, after all, was he sure that the results to her had been beneficial rather than disastrous? He sighed, consoled himself with the reflections that she must now have around her a family of sons and daughters, and that if ever she gave him a thought, it was to bless Heaven for her narrow escape; and, so fortified, he went on with his work.

When he awoke the next morning the chastened retrospective mood had passed. After his tea and cold tub, he sat down to the table by the eastern window through which the morning sun was streaming, setting the gorse ablaze and the heather blood-red, and attacked the final chapter of his epoch-making Treatise on the Theory of Groups. The thrill of a

great thing accomplished held him as he wrote. Such moments were worth living. He breakfasted with the appetite of a man who had earned a right to the material blessings of life. He went out, groomed the old grey mare and cleaned out the stable and dug up a patch of ground, rejoicing, like a young man, in his strength and in the fresh beauty of the day. On his return to his study he reviewed affectionately the monuments of two years' labour. The Treatise on the Theory of Groups, all but complete, lay in one neat pile of manuscript. Another represented further serious adventures into the Analytical Geometry of a Four-Dimensional Space than mortal man had ever undertaken. Who could tell whither those adventures could lead? Pure mathematics had demonstrated the existence of the planet Neptune in space of three dimensions. Pure mathematics applied to four dimensions might prove and explain many transcendental phenomena. The next world might be four-dimensional, and the spirits of the dead who inhabit it could easily enter confined three-dimensional space. That was Cayley's ingenious theory of Ghosts. You could carry it further to space of five, six, *n* dimensions; when you could treat the geometry of space of infinite dimensions as Euclid did the geometry of plain surfaces, you would have solved the riddle of the universe; you would have come direct to the Godhead. He turned lovingly over the leaves of the completed portion of this fascinating essay; also the neighbouring piles of rough notes, the result of laborious years in China. Another section of the long deal table was devoted to his translations and editions of the Chinese classics and to ancient Chinese MSS. and books, his originals and authorities. The final scholarly translation into English of the great book of the

Taotze—"The Book of Rewards and Punishments"—so full of deep wisdom, artlessness and charm, rose in three-part completion. It would knock dear old Stanislas Julien's French version of 1835 into a cocked hat. He had collated libraries undreamed of by Julien or by any subsequent scholar. It would make all the missionaries and consuls and other amateur sinologists wish they had never been born. . . . Then, again, were the Shih King—the Psalms of ancient China, resonant with music, bewildering with imagery, vibrating with emotion, hitherto done into English—*done in* into English—he chuckled as the mild jest occurred to him—by a worthy, prosaic and very learned missionary, much out of sympathy with ancient China because it had never heard of Jesus Christ before He was born—there were the Shih King in process of reverent and, as far as his power lay, of poetic translation. He took down from his shelves the volume containing the solemnly authoritative English text published by the Oxford University Press, and opened it at random. He read :

"*The angry terrors of compassionate Heaven extend through this lower world. (The King's) counsels and plans are crooked and bad ; when will he stop (in his course) ? Counsels that are good he will not follow. And those that are not good he employs. When I look at his counsels and plans, I am greatly pained.*"

He laughed out loud, shut the book and returned it to the shelf.

"'I am greatly pained' ! Oh, my Lord !"

He searched his manuscript for his own version, and read it with a satisfaction not devoid of smugness. A professional poet might have found, like the Chinese writer, the inevitable word, the sacred flash ; but, after all, he had made the thing deadened by the learned

Oxford professor live again ; he had suggested some of the music and the grace of the original—enough to attract and not to repel the ordinary English reader. And with all that, he would like to see any man, Chinese or European, pick a hole in his scholarship.

He lit his pipe, and before settling down to work again surveyed the great mass of his achievement. Life was truly worth living when, during its brief span, such great things could be done. With a short interval for luncheon, he worked steadily on through the day, sacrificing his accustomed spell of outdoor exercise ; and when Quong Ho, who had changed his nondescript European working kit for the cool, immaculate Chinese dress, announced that dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour, he had all but written Finis to his Treatise on the Theory of Groups.

" Lord ! " said he, " I must wash and get a mouthful of fresh air." He whistled to the dog, Brutus, who had lain at his feet most of the afternoon, and went off. When he got outside he discovered, to his surprise, for he had sat in front of a window all the time, that a white mist had gathered on the moorland and that his horizon as he stood on his doorstep was scarcely bounded by his rude granite wall. The fog covered him in like a cupola. He patted the Airedale's head and smiled, well content in this increased security of his isolation.

" We might be the last living beings on the face of the globe," said he to Quong Ho, who came to announce dinner.

" Yes, sir," said Quong Ho.

Baltazar shot a humorous glance at him : " The idea doesn't seem to provoke you to radiant enthusiasm."

" I fail to see, sir," replied Quong Ho, " who, in that hypothetical case, would benefit by your illuminat-

ing editions of the Chinese classics, and what advantage it would be to me to continue the severe study of Elliptic Functions."

"I'm afraid you're a dismal utilitarian," said his master, passing by him into the house. "Yet I suppose you're right," he added a few moments afterwards, as he sat down to table and unfolded his napkin. "If we were the only two people left in the world, we'd very soon chuck our intellectual pursuits. I don't think I care a damn for the things themselves. As far as I am solely and personally concerned, this excellent bit of grilled salmon is infinitely more vital than the discovery of any mathematical truth. The latter has only value as it relates to the progress of humanity. If there is no humanity, it is valueless. It won't help me on worth a cent. But the salmon, a typical edible, is essential to the physical existence of ME. So I should let Chinese philosophy and the Higher Mathematics go hang, and confine myself to the chase of salmon or rabbits or roots or acorns—and so would you—and in a very few years we should be hairy, long-nailed savages, flying at each other's throats for the last succulent bit of Brutus."

The dog, hearing his name, rested his long chin against his master's knee and regarded him with wistful eyes.

"No, old son," laughed Baltazar, giving him a morsel of salmon, "we're not at that point yet. Make your mind easy. You and I and Quong Ho will take our work out into the hurrying markets of the earth and find justification for all these lonely days. Although we're temporary recluses, we're valuable citizens of the world. We deserve more salmon."

Quong Ho presented the dish, and Baltazar and Brutus got their deserts.

Presently Quong Ho brought in lamb cutlets with fresh peas from the garden, which Baltazar attacked with relish.

"Quong Ho," said Baltazar, "you're a wonder. Is there anything you can't do?"

The young man smiled bland recognition of the compliment, but said nothing. As Baltazar's body-servant he refrained from familiar conversation. But Baltazar was in an expansive mood. He went on:

"You cook for me enchantingly. You serve me perfectly. Your attitude, Quong Ho, is one of the most exquisite tact. But if we were the last two persons on the earth, you would see me damned before you would devote yourself to my personal comfort in this unrestricted manner."

"I think not," replied Quong Ho. "The truths of religion would not be affected by the annihilation of the human race. To you, who are to me *in loco parenti*——"

"*Parentis*, my dear fellow. It's Latin. Make a note of it."

"I do so, mentally," said Quong Ho. "To you, sir, who are to me in the place of a parent, I owe filial obligation, and therefore I should not see you damned before I administered to your wants."

"Rubbish!" said Baltazar, with a wave of his hand.

"I speak the truth," said Quong Ho gravely.

Baltazar did not reply, but devoted himself to the cutlets and peas.

Quong Ho performed the sacred rite of the offering of wine. The meal was concluded in its nice formality of conventional life, and after coffee Baltazar lit his pipe and sat down to his usual hour's mental relaxation. But his mind wandered from *The Caxtons*,

which he had taken down from the shelves, to Quong Ho's quiet profession of loyalty. For all his intimate knowledge of the Chinese character, this perhaps was the first time that he realized the depth of the young man's real affection. And suddenly it occurred to him that he also was greatly attached to Quong Ho; not only through habit, or implicit trust, or gratitude for essential co-operation in carrying out his eccentric scheme of life, but by ties very simple and homely. Bacon, speaking of man, says: "If he have not a friend, he may quit the stage." Baltazar glowed with the thought that he could still act his part as a human being. He had his friend. Indeed, he had had one for all these months, and even years, without knowing it. The loneliness of soul which he had accepted as his portion from the time of his flight from Cambridge, and for the last day or two he had begun to dread, was filled by the incongruous sympathy of the young Chinaman. Hitherto he had accepted his fidelity as a matter of course; he had rewarded it by scrupulous observance of his obligations. But it had been his good pleasure to regard his disciple as a human and intellectual toy, all the more delectable for his lack of the humorous sense. To pull well-known strings and elicit platitudes expressed in the solemnity of his classically learned English had been his mischievous delight. But—"I speak the truth," Quong Ho had said; and the accent in which he had said it was one of grave conviction, even of rebuke.

He took up his book again and almost immediately let it drop.

"If I lost Quong Ho, what the devil would become of me?" He threw the book on to the floor and leaned back in his arm-chair, pipe in mouth, his hands clasped behind his head. In the whole wide world of

hundreds of millions of people he had not a single friend save Quong Ho. He had been very dense not to realize before the elementary truth that individual life is not supportable by itself. Newton's Third Law of Motion—*to every action there is always opposed an equal reaction*—was a law of life. The incessant reaction on the individual would be death. One other nature at least was needed for the distribution and application of vital forces, and in their mutual action and reaction could alone be found the compensation that was safety, sanity, normal human existence. And the more attuned were the parts of the reciprocal human machine, the greater the compensation ; this human adjustment had its degrees : understanding, friendship, affection, culminating in love—the perfect state.

When Quong Ho appeared, books and papers as usual under his arm, Baltazar waved an inviting arm.

" Take a chair, Quong Ho, and let us talk. Elliptic Functions are too inhuman for me to-night."

Quong Ho put his burden down on the table and brought up a straight-backed, rush-bottomed chair, and sat down stiffly, facing his master, who took up his parable.

" I've been thinking of what you said at dinner. You touched on a spiritual aspect of the hypothetical emotion we were discussing which did not occur to me. What made you do it ? "

" Sir," replied Quong Ho, " if you will permit me to speak my thoughts, I cannot separate life into two watertight departments——"

" *Com*partments," murmured Baltazar, through force of habit.

Quong Ho bowed. " I recollect. To resume. I cannot separate life into two watertight compartments

—the material and the spiritual. It appears to me to be the subtle interfusion, the solemnization of holy matrimony, between the two."

"One of the charms, my son, of your conversation," laughed Baltazar, "is its unexpected allusiveness."

Quong Ho rose and made a deep bow.

"You have called me, sir, by a term which overwhelms me with filial gratitude."

Baltazar, who had used the word deliberately, held out his hand.

"I believe," said he in Chinese, "in your profession of a son's affection, and therefore I admit you to the position. After a year or so our lives will materially be separated, but spiritually they will run the same course."

"This is the happiest and most fortunate day of my life," said Quong Ho.

"Without going into superlatives," replied Baltazar in English, "I may reciprocate the sentiment."

They talked on, developing the idea of wedding of the material and the spiritual, branching off into fascinating side-tracks, as men of alert intelligence delight to do in conversation, and coming back now and then with the flash of unexpectedness to the main issue. They touched on the hermits of the Thebaïd.

"Their outlook," said Baltazar, "was exclusively spiritual, fundamentally selfish. They were out to save their own silly, unimportant souls from hell-fire, and nothing else mattered. Egotism raised to infinity. Our retirement has nothing at all in common with theirs."

"Sir," said Quong Ho, "since we are speaking very seriously, may I, without indiscretion, ask you whether you too are not out to save your soul?"

Baltazar rose from his chair and strode up and down

the long room, casting at Quong Ho a swift glance from beneath frowning brows every time he passed him. At last he halted and said :

" That's so. The history of my inner life has been an attempt to save my soul. But there's a hell of a lot of difference between me and St. Simeon Stylites. That was a kind of ass who sat for years on the top of a pillar and never did a hand's turn for anybody. All he thought of was his escape from hell. Now I, as far as my soul is concerned, don't care a hang whether it's going to hell or heaven. My object in saving it is to be of use to my fellow-creatures."

Quong Ho, who had risen when his master rose, said :

" All that is clear to me. I too am here for the same purpose."

" You ? " cried Baltazar. " What's wrong with you ? "

" I want to eradicate from my mind the soul-destroying associations of the daughter of the gardener Fung Yu."

Then Baltazar laughed aloud and clapped the young Chinaman on the shoulder, an unprecedented act of hearty familiarity.

" My son," said he, " this is a discipline that will bring us both, me old, you young, to the greater wisdom. In the meanwhile, it's a happy discipline, isn't it ? We've got all that mortal man—under discipline, mark you—all that mortal man can want. Spiritually, we have the sacred relations of father and son. Intellectually, we are equals, and "—he threw an arm around the room—" we have the learning of the world at our command. Materially—what more can we desire ? "

He looked fondly around the long, low-ceilinged

room, brilliantly illuminated by four petroleum lamps and half a dozen candles, and dwelt upon its homely, scholarly comfort ; the Turkey carpets ; the easeful chairs and sofa ; the exquisite and priceless rolls of Chinese paintings between the bookcases ; the bookcases filled, some with the old-world books of Europe, others with the literature of China, printed volumes, manuscripts beyond money value ; the long table piled with the inestimable results of human intellect ; the warm bronze curtains before each of the four windows ; the dear and familiar form of the very dog, Brutus, stretched out asleep in front of the great chimney-piece. And the silence was that of the most exclusive and the most untroubled corner of Paradise.

"What a Heaven-sent thing is Peace," said Baltazar.

At that moment the silence was disturbed by a strange and unknown sound. Baltazar and Quong Ho started and looked questioningly at each other. It seemed like the distant beating of almighty wings. They held their breath. No, it was like the sweeping thunder of an express train. But what should express trains be doing on the moorland ? With common impulse they rose and went out of doors into the thick mist. Then the thundering, clattering rush broke vibrant on their ears. It was in the air around, above them. John Baltazar put his hand to a bewildered head. What unheard-of convulsion of nature was this ? Then suddenly he had a second's consciousness of bursting flame and overwhelming crash, and the blackness of death submerged his senses.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN he recovered consciousness it was but to awake to an incomprehensible dream condition. Of his whereabouts he had no notion. An attempt to move caused him such hideous pain in his head as almost to render him again unconscious. His limbs, too, seemed under the control of dream paralysis. He lay for a while co-ordinating his faculties, until he arrived at the definite conviction that he was awake. His eyes rested on ashlars of granite which, as he lay on his left side, continued in a long line ; also, cast downwards, they rested on rough grass. Gradually he realized that he was in the open air, that the stones were part of his wall. What he was doing there he could not tell. He felt sick and faint. By an effort of will he moved a leg. The movement revealed unaccustomed stiffness of limb : it also reawakened the torture of his head. Again he stayed motionless. Yes, it was daylight. It was sunlight ; some twenty feet further down the wall cast a shadow. Presently over his recovering senses stole an abominable stench. He sniffed, jerking his head to its intolerable agony. Cautiously he lifted his right hand to the seat of pain. His fingers dabbled in something like thick glue. Bringing them down before his eyes, he saw they were covered with coagulated blood. He felt again, and realized, in stupid amazement, that his hair was stuck to a stone. The first thing to be done was to liberate

himself. He remembered afterwards that he said: "Let us concentrate on this: nothing else for the moment matters." He concentrated, and at last, after infinite suffering that made him cry aloud, he freed his hair from its glutinous imprisonment and, spent with the effort, rolled over on the flat of his back and gazed upwards into the blue sky. A faint breeze swept over him. But the breeze was laden with the same abominable stench.

As soon as he could gather sufficient physical energy he rose to a sitting posture, supporting himself on his hands, and gazed spellbound and stupefied on a scene of unimaginable disaster. Where once stretched the familiar long-lying homestead, there was nothing but an inchoate mass of stones, from the midst of which eddied and swirled columns of black smoke. And the wind blew the smoke towards him. Looking down, he found himself begrimed by it. He sat forward, staring, and, secure of balance, withdrew his hands and put them up to his brow, seeking a clue to the mystery. Memory, stage after stage, returned. He had been sitting at night with Quong Ho. They had heard a strange noise. They had gone out to discover what it was. Then——? What had happened then? Just a terror of Hell opening—and nothingness. Yes, he remembered. It was dense mist when they went out. Now it was clear, beautifully clear. The sun was shining; but it was low on the horizon; so it must be early morning.

What could have happened? A thunderstorm? The place struck by lightning? He gripped his temples. He had never heard of a thunderstorm in a dense fog. Besides, thunder never occurred in the long, continuous, rhythmical acceleration of volume of sound. Yet what else but thunder and lightning

could account for the blasted homestead that reeked before his eyes?

He looked around. The stone enclosure was strewn with unspeakable wreckage: blocks of masonry, unrecognizable shafts of timber, bits of twisted iron railing, ashes, charred wood. . . . He rose dizzily to his feet. His head was one agony. He felt something wet on his neck, and realized that the wound, evidently caused by the concussion of his head against a stone, had begun to bleed afresh. Before he could tie around his brows the handkerchief which he mechanically drew out, he saw, close by, the dead body of the dog Brutus, and he returned the handkerchief to his pocket. The dog seemed to have been killed outright by a great piece of granite that had been hurled upon him. Then for the first time his mind grew quite clear. The unknown convulsion had dealt not only destruction, but death. Where was Quong Ho?

He started forthwith on an agonized search. They had been standing together a few paces away from the front door. Thither he went, but could find no trace of him among the wreckage. From the roofless enclosure of granite and through the windows poured black volumes of smoke. It was useless, even impossible, to look inside. Baltazar called out loudly the Chinaman's name as he made a circuit of the devastated house, only to find fresh evidences of complete catastrophe. Here and there lay fragments of iron unfamiliar to him, which in his anxiety for Quong Ho's safety he did not speculate on or examine. He nearly tripped over something by the burned-down stable. Looking down, to his sickening horror, he found it to be the head of the old grey mare. He went on. No sign of Quong Ho. In the little enclosed grass patch, now foul with rubbish, the very goats

lay dead, mostly dismembered. He stared at them stupidly. A sudden shrill noise caused him to jump aside in terror. A second later he realized that it came from a solitary cockerel, strutting about in the sunshine, the sole survivor of the poultry-run, cynically proclaiming his lust of life.

Wherever he turned was ruin utter and final. But where was Quong Ho? Had he not, after all, remained outside, but re-entered the house? If so—he shuddered. Creeping back, he peered through the windows on the windward side as long as the smart in his eyes would allow him. There was nothing there but fragments of stone and smouldering, indistinguishable ash that mounted nearly to the sill. Whatever had been the cause, the dry thatch had been set alight—the roof had fallen in, and nothing of the interior remained save a few charred books on the upper shelves of blackened and crazily precarious sections of bookcase. He strode away, came to the front of the house again, and continued his search there, with horror in his soul. The front door had been blown out. On his first inspection he had passed it by. Now he stood wondering at the supernatural explosion that could have burst it from its hinges and thrown its great weight bodily forth; and, looking at it, suddenly became conscious of a foot, shod in a Chinese shoe, protruding from beneath it. He bent down swiftly and touched the foot. Shouted "Quong Ho!" But there was no reply. He rose, remained for a moment with the horror of the old mare's head, and other things he had seen in the goats' enclosure, racking his nerves. Then he braced himself, bent and lifted the door, and under it lay the body of Quong Ho. To lever the heavy mass and set it upright without treading on the motionless man taxed all his

strength. At last he got a footing on the further side of Quong Ho, which enabled him to set the door on edge, and a push sent it clattering clear. Then he saw that the corner had rested on a stone by Quong Ho's head and so had not crushed his face.

He bent down, made a rapid examination ; then sank back on his heels, and thanked God that Quong Ho was still alive. There was a wound on his head somewhat like his own, which until then he had all but forgotten. As far as he could make out the leg was broken in one or two places. Possibly ribs. He did not know. He took off his grey flannel jacket, the back of which was drenched in blood, and, rolling it up, put it beneath Quong Ho's head. The obvious thing to do next was to fetch water, bandages, stimulant—there was a medicine-chest and brandy in the house. After a few impulsive strides he stopped short. There were no bandages, no brandy. What remained of them lay in the burning filth within the house walls. But water ? He prayed God there might be some in the scullery. He found the pump that worked the well broken, but the blessed stream ran from the tap, showing that there was still some reserve in the fortunately undamaged cistern. As best he might, he cleaned out and filled a pail ; found an unbroken yellow bowl, and took them out to where Quong Ho lay. He went back to search for linen or rag ; but in that welter of destruction he could find nothing. His own handkerchief was absurdly inadequate. Luckily, the day before being warm, he had changed before lunch into a thin undervest and a linen shirt. The latter he removed and tore into strips, and so he bathed and bandaged Quong Ho's head. He also ripped up the man's trousers and cut shoes and socks from the swollen feet, and with the remainder of the

shirt made compresses. And all the time Quong Ho showed no sign of returning consciousness. Evidently he was suffering from severe concussion.

It was only when he had finished his rough dressings that the ghastliness of his isolation smote him. He must leave Quong Ho there alone, uncared for, and go across the moor in search of help. Suppose his own leg had been broken. The sweat stood on his forehead. They would have lain there and starved to death, like stricken animals in a wilderness. Meanwhile the sun was rising higher in the sky and was beating down upon Quong Ho. With a mighty effort he raised him in his arms and staggered with him to the other side of the house, where there would be shade for some hours : where, too, the evil smoke could not eddy over him. Placing the jacket again beneath his head and the bowl filled with fresh water by his side, on the off-chance of his recovering consciousness, he left the scene of desolation and horror.

About a mile away he realized that he had not tended his own wounded head, which, without any covering from the sun, was throbbing in exquisite agony. His handkerchief he had left with the remainder of the shirt. He also realized that he was bare-armed, clad only in the summer undervest and flannel trousers and the light gym shoes in which he used to fence. He reeked all over, hands and arms and body, with soot and blood. All this soon passed from his mind. Things whirred in his brain, so that he feared lest he were growing light-headed. Also, although he had drunk a little water before starting, he began to be tormented with a burning thirst. He lost sense of the vastness of the calamity that had befallen him, lost the power, too, of speculating on its cause. All his mind was concentrated on battling against tortured

nerves and reeling brain, in order to achieve one object. He kept on repeating to himself what he should say to the first human being he should meet; fortified himself with the reflection: "Three miles to the road; three-quarters of an hour." But only having traversed the barely distinguishable track thrice before —once when he made the return journey from Water-End to view the hermitage, and on the other occasion when he drove thither to take up residence—he missed it, and strayed diagonally across the moor. At last, after a couple of hours' wandering, he reached a ditch beyond which stretched the dazzling white ribbon of road. He fell into the ditch like a drunken man, managed to clamber out, and, on the further side, stumbled and lay exhausted, unable to move. After a few minutes he staggered to his feet, and swayed down the road, which was as lonely as the moorland.

Suddenly he became aware of a difference: of trees and laurels and verdure on his left, and in the midst of them stood a couple of tall granite pillars with a gateway between. It was a house. He had won through. Inside was human aid. He made his way to the gate and clutched the top bar to steady himself, and looked down a well-ordered drive. As he looked a man appeared from a side-path, who, after regarding the haggard apparition grotesquely clad, covered with grime and blood, for a few gasping seconds, rushed up.

"Hello! Hello! What's the matter? Why—I'm jiggered! It's Mr. Baltazar!"

Baltazar swept a hand towards the moor, and said hoarsely:

"My Chinese friend is over there, dying. There's been an accident. Explosion or something. He's dying. You must send men and doctors at once."

"Good Lord!" cried the man. "Of course I

will. Come inside and tell me all about it. You don't mean to say those bombs got you? You look in a damn fine old mess too."

He opened the gate, clasped Baltazar round the waist, and supported him down the drive. Soon an old gardener came up and lent a hand, and between them they carried the half-fainting Baltazar into the house and laid him on a couch in the dining-room. The host poured out a stiff brandy and soda.

"Here, drink this."

The cool bubbling liquid was a draught of Paradise to Baltazar's parched throat. The unaccustomed stimulant, after a few moments, had its bracing effect.

"Now, what's it all about? You remember me, don't you? Pillivant's my name. Came to call about eighteen months ago, and you turned me down. Anyhow, that's forgotten. I don't bear malice, especially when a chap seems down and out. What can I do for you?"

Baltazar said: "There was an explosion last night. It knocked me out. I woke up this morning to find my house burned to the ground. My Chinese friend is there unconscious, with concussion of the brain and broken legs. I had to come for assistance. You must send at once."

"All right," said Pillivant. "You stay there. I'll do some telephoning. Meanwhile I'll send the wife to look after you. You want a wash and a change, and a doctor and bed."

"Bed!" cried Baltazar. "I must go back to Quong Ho."

He rose to his feet, as Pillivant left the room, and tottered after him. But he found himself foolishly lying on the floor. He said to himself:

"He has given me brandy. He's sending his wife. She'll think I'm drunk." And with a great effort he re-established himself on the couch.

In a few minutes Mrs. Pillivant entered. She was a faded, fair woman in the late thirties, wearing a cloth skirt and tartan silk low-cut blouse, and a string of pearls around a bony neck.

"So you've been Zepped, I hear," she said. "No, don't get up. Stay where you are. If you haven't heard it already, you'll be glad to know it came down in flames on the moor about twenty miles away, and all the brutes were burned alive."

Baltazar set his teeth, monstrously striving to get his brain to work.

"Brutes? What brutes? What are you talking about? I don't understand."

"Why, the crew of the Zeppelin. Where it came from or what it was doing about here, we don't know —we'll have to wait until news comes from London. It must have been badly damaged, and lost its way in the mist. They must have got rid of their bombs before trying to land, so my husband says—but before they had time to land the Zeppelin came to grief. We heard the bombs, but thought they had dropped on the moor. We'd no idea they had got anybody."

"Zeppelin! Zeppelin!" murmured Baltazar. "I seem to have heard the name——"

"It's pretty familiar, I should think," said Mrs. Pillivant. "Don't you think the best thing to do is to let us put you to bed until the doctor comes?"

"The doctor must go to Quong Ho at once. He's dying," said Baltazar.

"Then I'm sure I don't know what to do," said Mrs. Pillivant.

Baltazar closed his eyes. "I'll be all right in a

minute. It's the knock on the head, and the long walk on an empty stomach."

"Oh, I'll get you something to eat. What would you like?"

"Nothing," said Baltazar. "Nothing. A bit of a rest and I must go back to Quong Ho. He's the only creature I care about in the world. He was just alive when I left him."

She said in a helpless sort of way: "I hope you're not seriously hurt?"

He opened his eyes. "No, no. My head's pretty thick. But I'm not as young as I was. By the way, you were talking of a Zeppelin. That's a German airship, isn't it?"

"Why—of course——"

He raised himself on his elbow, and his eyes flashed beneath his knit brows.

"Why should German airships be dropping bombs on the moor?"

Mrs. Pillivant regarded him uncomprehendingly.

"I've told you. They had to get rid of their bombs before they landed."

"But what were they carrying bombs for?"

"I wouldn't worry about that now," she replied rather nervously. "I don't think you realize how very ill you are."

"I'm not ill—not out of my mind, at any rate. I want to know. Why should they carry bombs? Wait a bit. I'm all right now. My mind's clear. You said the airship came down in flames and the brutes were killed. Tell me what it means."

"Surely you've heard of the air raids? Read about them in the papers?"

"I see no newspapers," said Baltazar. "Air raids? For God's sake tell me what you mean?"

She glanced round to see that access to the door was clear. His aspect—his shaggy hair clotted with blood and dirt—his eyes gleaming from a haggard, grimed and bloody face—the filth of his half-nakedness—alone would have frightened a timorous woman. And his words were those of a madman. She giggled hysterically.

"I suppose you've heard there's a European war on?"

He sat up. "War! What war?"

Mrs. Pillivant fled from the room. Baltazar rose to his feet.

War? War with Germany? Naturally Germany, because Zeppelins were German airships. A European war, the woman had said. His glance for the first time fell upon a newspaper on the dining-room table, open at the middle page. Forgetful of pain and exhaustion, he strode and seized it—and the headlines held him spellbound by their bewildering revelation.

Great Britain, France, Italy, Russia, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria . . . all Europe at war. The basic facts stood out in great capital letters.

He was staring at the print, absorbed as never had he been in his life before, when a heavy hand on his shoulder aroused him. He turned to meet the fat and smiling face of Pillivant.

"I've fixed it all up—doctor, police, ambulance. I'll take some in the Rolls-Royce, the doctor the others in his car. We'll have the Chink back in no time."

"The what?" asked Baltazar, with a swift glance.

"The Chink—the Chinaman——"

"Oh, yes. My friend, Mr. Quong Ho. If you don't mind, I'll come with you."

"My dear fellow, that's impossible. You must go

to bed. It's no trouble. There are fifteen bedrooms in the house. You can take your choice. Hasn't Mrs. Pillivant been in to see you ? "

" She did me that honour."

" Then why the dickens didn't she have you attended to ? I'll see about it."

He was already at the door when Baltazar checked him.

" Stop. Don't worry about me. Tell me one thing." He smote the open newspaper with the palm of his hand. " How long has this been going on ? "

" How long has what been going on ? " asked Pillivant, returning.

" This war."

" I don't quite see what you're driving at," said Pillivant, puzzled.

" I want to know how long this war I'm reading about in the newspaper has been going on."

Pillivant regarded him askance out of his little furtive eyes. He entertained the same suspicion as his wife.

" Look here, old man," he said, taking him by the arm, " that knock on the head's more serious than you think." At the noise of a halting car he glanced out of window. " Ah ! there's Dr. Rewsby."

" Never mind the doctor or my head," cried Baltazar desperately. " Answer my question. How long have we been at war with Germany ? "

" Why, since August, 1914."

" For the last two years ? "

" Do you mean to say you've been living eight or ten miles off and never heard of the war ? " Pillivant stood bewildered.

" I never heard of it," Baltazar answered mechanically, staring past Pillivant at terrifying things.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Pillivant, recovering his breath. "I'm just damned. Here, Doctor"—as a spare, grey-headed man was shown into the room—"here is a chap who has never heard of the war."

Baltazar stepped forward. "That's beside the question, Doctor. All that matters for the moment is my Chinese friend. I had to leave him at the farm unconscious, with, I should think, concussion. And his legs are fractured. We must go at once."

"Excuse me," said the doctor, "but that wound in your own head wants seeing to. Just a matter of cleaning and strapping. Only five minutes. Please let me have a look at it."

"You can do that afterwards," said Baltazar. "For God's sake let us go."

"You're not fit to go. I won't allow you to," replied Dr. Rewsby with suave firmness.

Said Baltazar, with the hard gleam in his eyes: "I'm going. It's my responsibility, not yours. I don't care what happens to me. But I swear that I'll neither wash nor eat nor drink until my friend Quong Ho is brought back, alive or dead. And it's much better I should go with you than remain here and frighten your excellent wife, Mr. Pillivant, out of her wits."

There was a moment's silence. The grey-haired doctor glanced at Baltazar out of the corner of a shrewd eye and diagnosed an adamantine obstinacy.

"If you refuse to take me with you," Baltazar added, "I'll follow you on foot."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will. But if anything happens—tetanus, blood-poisoning, collapse—I wash my hands of responsibility. Mr. Pillivant will bear me out. Let us go."

In the hall Pillivant took down from the pegs of an alcove a cap and light overcoat.

"You don't mind sticking on these, do you?" he said to Baltazar. "You'll need them motoring, and besides, I don't mind telling you, you're not looking exactly like a candidate for a beauty show."

"I thank you," said Baltazar, accepting the proffered raiment.

They started. The doctor, Sergeant Doubleday and a constable, with a stretcher, in one car; Pillivant, Baltazar, and a chauffeur at the wheel, in the great Rolls-Royce.

"To carry through this," said Pillivant, hauling out a thick gold watch, "in twenty minutes, shows what we English can do when we set our minds to it."

"Twenty minutes?" said Baltazar. "It has seemed like three hours."

"Twenty minutes since I went to the telephone," Pillivant asserted triumphantly.

The cars raced on. For some moments Baltazar, huddled together in the comfort of the back seat, maintained a brooding silence, which Pillivant, glaring at him from time to time, did not care to disturb. There was something uncanny about this man who had to be bombed nearly to death in order to hear of the war.

They turned off the road on to the rough track across the moor along which Quong Ho had so often bumped his way in the old cart. The weather had been dry and the track was at its best. But the cars jolted alarmingly, and at every quivering descent from a larger hummock than usual Pillivant cried out in fear for the springs of his Rolls-Royce.

"If it busts up, there's no earthly chance of getting another."

"Why?" asked Baltazar.

"Because there's a war on, old man. You don't seem to understand."

"I'm afraid I don't," said Baltazar. "You must grant me your kind indulgence. I can't immediately realize what is happening."

They climbed the rise that brought them into view of the farm. Pillivant pointed to the smoking ruins.

"That'll help you to realize it. That's what Belgium and the northern part of France look like."

"When I have found my friend Quong Ho alive," said Baltazar, "I may be able to think of things."

They worked their way, Dr. Rewsby's lighter car following, almost to the low enclosing wall, and drew to a halt. Viewed on the approach, the havoc loomed before Baltazar's eyes even more appalling than when he had stood dazed and sick in the midst of it. The battered granite shell of the house stood absurdly low, and the rough gaping apertures of door and windows stared like maimed features hideously human. The wall of the scullery had been thrown down by the explosion, and the pump and cistern and a shelf or two of broken crockery were grimly exposed. He wondered why he had not noticed this when he went to fetch water for Quong Ho. The byre by the wrecked stable no longer existed. The white Wyandotte cockerel, the sole living thing visible, pecked about the ground in jaunty unconcern.

As soon as they dismounted the party followed Baltazar, who strode ahead with the air of a man about to denounce a ghost. At the turn of the ruined house they came in sight of Quong Ho, lying as Baltazar had left him, the bowl of water untouched. The sun had gradually encroached upon him, and now the shadow of the wall cut his body in a long vertical line.

His yellow face looked pinched and ghastly beneath the pink and white cotton of his bandaged head.

Baltazar's face was almost as ghastly, and horrible fear dwelt in his eyes. He pointed.

"There!" he said, and drew the doctor forward and motioned to the others to remain.

Together they bent down over Quong Ho. "If he's dead," Baltazar whispered in a hoarse voice, "it's I who have murdered him."

"He's not dead yet," replied the doctor.

"Thank God!" said Baltazar.

Sergeant Doubleday, surveying the scene of ruin with the eye of the policeman and the Briton, turned to Mr. Pillivant.

"This sort of thing oughtn't to be allowed," said he.

CHAPTER VIII

BALTAZAR awoke a couple of mornings afterwards to find that certain vague happenings which he had regarded as dreams were true. He really lay in a comfortable bed, in a pleasant room; the soft-voiced woman in grey, whose ministrations he had been unable to divine, stood smiling at the foot of his bed, an unmistakable nurse. Conscious of discomfort, he raised his hand and felt his head swathed in a close-fitting, scientific bandage. He remembered now that he had lain there for a considerable time. What he had taken for outrageous assaults on his brain for the purpose of extracting the secrets of his mathematical researches had been the doctor dressing his wounds.

"How are you this morning?" asked the nurse.

"Perfectly well, thank you," said Baltazar. "I should feel better if you would tell me where I am."

"This is Mr. Pillivant's house."

"Pillivant—Pillivant? Oh, yes. I've got it. It seems as if I had been off my head for a bit." The nurse nodded. "I'm all right now. Let me put things together." Suddenly he sat up.

"How is Quong Ho?"

"He is getting on as well as can be expected," replied the nurse.

"He's alive? Quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

Baltazar fell back on the pillow. "The last thing I remember clearly was their taking him into the cottage hospital, after that infernal jolting across the moor. What happened then?"

"You collapsed, and they brought you here."

"What day is it?"

"Friday."

"Good Lord," said Baltazar, "I've been here since midday Wednesday."

"Would you like a little breakfast?"

"I should like a lot," declared Baltazar.

The nurse laughed. The patient was better. She turned to leave the room, but Baltazar checked her.

"Before you go just tell me if I've got the situation clear. The European war has been going on for two years. In the course of a new-fangled kind of warfare the Germans drop bombs from Zeppelins over England. A Zeppelin dropped bombs on my house on Tuesday night—to get rid of them—so Mrs. Pillivant said. You see, everything's coming back to me. Afterwards it came down in flames, and all the crew were burned. Is that right?"

"Perfectly," said the nurse.

"Now I know more or less where I am," said Baltazar.

The nurse fetched his breakfast, which he ate with appetite. He had barely finished when Dr. Rewsby entered.

"This is capital. Capital," said he. "Sitting up and taking nourishment. How's the pulse?"

"Never mind about me," said Baltazar, as the doctor took hold of his wrist. "What about Quong Ho?"

The doctor gave a serious report. Fractured

skull, severe concussion. Broken legs. Semi-consciousness, however, had returned—the hopeful sign. But it would be a ticklish and tedious business.

"If you want another opinion, a man from Harley Street, special nurses, don't hesitate a second," said Baltazar. "Money's no object."

"I'll bear in mind what you say," replied the doctor; "but if his constitution is as sound as yours, he'll do all right. By all the rules of the game you ought to be as helpless as he is."

"What's wrong with me?"

"You've had half your scalp torn away. How you manage to be sitting up now, eating eggs, after your lunatic performances on Wednesday, is more than I can understand."

Baltazar smiled grimly. "I can't afford the time to fool about in a state of unconsciousness when I have two years' arrears of European history to make up."

"Never mind European history," said the doctor. "Let us see how this head of yours is getting on."

The dressing completed, he said to Baltazar:

"Now you'll lie quiet and not worry about the war, Quong Ho, or anything."

"And grow wings and order a halo and work out the quadrature of the circle and discover the formula for the Deity in terms of the Ultimate Function of Energy. . . . Man alive!" he cried impetuously, raising himself on his elbow, "don't you understand? I've been dead for years—my own silly, selfish doing—and now I've come to life and found the world in an incomprehensible mess. If I don't go out and try to understand it, I shall go stark, staring mad!"

"I can only order you to stay in bed till I give

you permission to get up," said the doctor. "Good-bye. I'll come in this evening."

As soon as he had gone Baltazar threw off the bedclothes and sprang to his feet.

"Doctors be hanged!" said he. "I've not given in to illness all my life long, and I'm not going to begin now. Besides, I'm as fit as ever I was. I'm going to dress."

"I'm afraid you can't," said the nurse.

"Why?"

"You haven't any clothes."

He glanced for a second or two at the unfamiliar green and purple striped silk pyjamas in which he was clad, and remembered the undervest and flannel trousers, foul with blood and grime, in which he had arrived at Water-End.

"The devil!" said he, and he stood gasping as a new conception of himself flashed across his mind. "Except for these borrowed things, I am even more naked than when I came into the world."

"You'd better go back to bed," said the nurse.

"I've got to go back to the world," retorted Baltazar. "As quick as possible."

"You can't do it in pyjamas," said the nurse.

"I must ask my host to lend me some clothes."

"I'll go down and see him about it," said the nurse.

She went out, leaving Baltazar sitting on the edge of the bed. Presently entered Pillivant, who burst into heartiness of greeting. Delighted he was to see him looking so well. At one time he half expected there was going to be a funeral in the house. Heard that he wanted some togs. Only too happy to rig him out. Would pick out all the necessary kit to-morrow.

"But I want clothes now," said Baltazar.

Pillivant shook his head. "Must obey doctor's orders. By disobeying in the first place I nearly had a cold corpse on my hands, and if there's one thing Mrs. Pillivant dislikes more than another, it's a corpse. When her old aunt died here she went half off her chump. No, no, old man," he continued, in soothing tones which exasperated Baltazar, "you be good and lie doggo to-day, as the doctor says, and to-morrow we'll see about getting up."

"You've got the whip-hand of me," said Baltazar, glowering.

"That's about it," grinned Pillivant. "And you're not used to not having your own way."

"I suppose I'm not," said Baltazar, looking at his host more kindly. "I don't know but what you're right. A little discipline might be beneficial for me." He slipped back into the bed and nodded to the nurse, who settled him comfortably. "A little contact with other people might restore my manners. As I'm beholden to you for everything, Mr. Pillivant, I may at least be civil. As a matter of fact, I'm infinitely grateful, and I place myself in your hands unreservedly."

"Oh, that's all right, old man," said Pillivant.

"It isn't all right," cried Baltazar, realizing, in his self-condemnatory way, the ungracious attitude he had adopted from the first towards his host. "I've been merely rude. I'm sorry. I've lived in China long enough to know that no personal catastrophe can excuse lack of courtesy. By obeying your medical man I see that I shall give least trouble to your household."

"You needn't talk like a book about it," said Pillivant.

"I've lived with books so long," replied Baltazar, "that perhaps I have lost the ways of contemporary Englishmen."

Pillivant threw him a furtive and suspicious glance.

"Most books are all dam rot," he declared.

"You're not the first philosopher that has enunciated that opinion," said Baltazar, with a laugh. "Didn't a character in one of the old dramatists—I think—say, 'To mind the inside of a book is to entertain oneself with the forced product of another man's brain'? No. It's the practical men who do things, isn't it?"

"I'm a practical man myself," said Pillivant, "and seeing as how I started as an office-boy at eight shillings a week, I've done a blooming lot of things. Look"—he swung a chair, and sat down near the bed, and bent confidentially towards Baltazar—"in July fourteen I was only a little builder and contractor up at Holloway. When Kitchener in September called for his million men——"

"Wait!" cried Baltazar, putting his hand up to his forehead. "In September nineteen fourteen Kitchener called for a *million men*?"

"Yes, yes, that's all ancient history. I was telling you—when the cry went out, I said to myself: a million men will want accommodation. Temporary buildings. Huts. No end of timber. I hadn't a penny in the world. But I did a big bluff and sold the Government timber which I hadn't got for twice the price I knew I could buy it at. In six months I was a rich man, and I've been growing richer and richer ever since. I've got a flat in Park Lane and this house in the country, and I'm on Munitions, and I have my cars and as much petrol to burn as I want, and I'm a useful man to the Govern-

ment, and doing my bit for the war. And none of your blooming books about it. Just plain common sense. If I had been worrying my head about books I should have lost my chance. Just what you've done. You've been burying yourself in books and haven't even heard of the war, let alone doing anything for your country. Books make me tired. To hell with them!"

Baltazar looked at the puffy, small-eyed man in his clear way. He disliked him exceedingly. Even with the most limited knowledge of war conditions, it was evident he had been exploiting them to his own advantage. But when you haven't a rag of your own to your back and are dressed in another man's pyjamas, lying in his bed and eating his food, you must observe the decencies of life.

"I suppose lots of fortunes are being made out of this war."

"I should think so. Those honestly made, well, the chaps with brains deserve them. But, at the same time, there's a lot of profiteering going on"—Pillivant shook an unctuous head—"which is a perfect disgrace."

"Profiteering—that's a new word."

"You'll find lots of new words and lots of all sorts of new things now you've waked up."

"I'm sure I shall," said Baltazar. "And now, if you've half an hour to spare, I wonder if you would mind telling me something about the war."

That day and the next, Baltazar listened to Pillivant, the nurse and the doctor's story of the world conflict, and read everything bearing on the subject with which they could supply him. Dr. Rewsby, who did not share Pillivant's disdain for books, ran-

sacked the little town for war literature. He bought him white books, pamphlets, back numbers of magazines and newspapers, maps. . . . What he heard, what he read, was the common knowledge of every intelligent child, but to this man of vast intellectual achievement it was staggeringly new. For those two days he lost sense of time, desire to move from the bewildering mass of lambent history that grew in piles by his bedside. The lies, the treacheries, the horrors that had accumulated on the consciousness of all other men one by one, burst upon him in one thundering concentration of hell. The martyrdom of Belgium, the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral, the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the use of poison gas, the bombing of open towns, the unmasking of the German Beast in all its lust and shamelessness —stunned him, so that at times he would put his hands to his head and cry : " It's impossible ! I can't believe it." And whoever was with him would answer : " It is true. What you read is but the outside of the devilry the civilized world is out to fight." And his scholar's mind would revolt. What of intellectual Germany ? The mathematicians, the Orientalists, whose names were to him like household words, to say nothing of those eminent in sciences outside the sphere of his own studies ? They were worse, the doctor declared, than the brutish peasant or the brutal operative. A monstrous intellectualism developed to the disregard of ethical sanction. The doctor brought him one of the great cartoons of the war, which he had cut out from some paper and kept, by Norman Lindsay, the great Australian black and white artist—the " Jekyll and Hyde " cartoon, representing a typical benevolent elderly German professor regarding himself in a mirror ; and the

reflection was a gorilla in Prussian spiked helmet and uniform, dripping with blood. And then Baltazar's blood curdled in his veins as he realized the truth of the picture. All the mighty intellectualism of Germany was but an instrument of its gorilla animalism. It was an overwhelming revelation: the almost mesmeric dominance of Prussia over the other Teutonic States of Germany and Austria, reducing them to Prussia's own atrophied civilization; that atrophied civilization itself, till now unanalysed, but now a byword of history, the development, on abnormal intellectual lines, of the ruthless barbarism of a non-European race. Strange that he had not thought of it before. Had anything good—any poem, picture, song, music, statue, dream building, sweet philosophy—ever come out of Prussia? Never. Not one. Her children were "fire and sword, red ruin and the breaking-up of laws." And now the rest of the Germanic Empire had lost its soul. Prussia extended from the Baltic to the Danube. The whole of Central Europe was one vast cesspool, in which all things good were cast to deliquesce in putrefaction, while over it floated supreme the livid miasma of Prussianism.

In some sort of figurative conception as this did his brain realize the psychological meaning of the forces against which the civilized world was struggling. But there was the other side of the world's embattled hosts, whose tremendous energies baffled his mental grasp. England's Navy—yes. He had been born and bred in the belief of its invincibility. But the British Army? A glorious army, of course; a blaze of honour from Cressy upwards; a sure shield and buckler in the far-flung posts of Empire; but a thing necessarily apart from the vast military systems

of the Continent of Europe. And now he learned, to his stupefaction, that the British Empire, calling up all her sons from within those same far-flung posts, had made itself, within two years, one of the three greatest military powers in the world. The casualties alone exceeded the total strength of the original British Army serving with the colours. The Army now was an organization of millions. Where had they come from? His three interpreters of the outer world gave him information according to their respective lights. All the early gathering of the hosts had been voluntary enlistments. The armies springing up at Lord Kitchener's call had been labelled numerically by his magic name. Only recently had we been driven to conscription. And Kitchener himself—the only great soldier of whom he had ever heard? Drowned in the *Hampshire* last June. . . .

Then, again, the revolution in national life—the paper currency, the darkened streets of towns, the licensing laws—further excited his throbbing curiosity. He remembered with a spasm almost of remorse the few signs and tokens of war which had reached him and passed unheeded; the National Registration, which he had resented as a bureaucratic impertinence; the mad taxation of income which he had regarded as evidence of England's decay. . . .

"Has ever man been such a fool as I since the world began?"

The hard-headed doctor to whom this rhetorical question was addressed, replied:

"I can't recall an instance."

When driven to contemplation of his own isolation, he reflected that all the time there had been a living link between himself and this upheaved world. Every

week, rain or fine, through snow or dust, Quong Ho had visited the little town.

"When did the news of the war become general in Water-End?" he asked.

He had to put the question in two or three different forms before his puzzled informants could perceive its drift, for they could not conceive it being the question of an intelligent man. He could not yet realize the electric shock that convulsed the land from end to end on the declaration of war. He could not gauge the immediate disruption of social life throughout the country. The calling up of reservists, the mobilization of the Territorial forces alone instantly affected every community, no matter how remote from centres of industry. The queer straits to which every community was reduced, owing to the closing of the banks during that fateful August week, had also brought the reality of the war home to every individual. Then the issue of Treasury notes. The recruiting. From the very first day of the war, Water-End, they told him, was as much agog with it all as London itself. From the beginning the town had been plastered with patriotic posters. The mayor for the first months had exhibited the latest telegrams outside the town hall. There had been a camp of Territorials some few miles away, and the High Street had reeked of war. Government war notices met the least observant eye in post office, bank and railway station.

"If what you say is true," said Baltazar, "how could Quong Ho have come here every week and failed to understand what was going on? Not only is he a master of English, but he's a man of acute intellect."

"That," replied the doctor, "you must ask Quong

Ho when his intellect has recovered from its present eclipse."

"But the fellow must have known all along," Baltazar persisted. "Come now"—he sat up in bed impulsively—"he must, mustn't he?"

"I should have thought that a negro from Central Africa, who only spoke Central African, would have guessed," replied the doctor.

"Then why the devil didn't he tell me?"

"I'm afraid I must refer you to my previous answer," said the doctor.

"It strikes me that I'm a bigger fool than ever," said Baltazar.

A smile flitted over the grey-haired doctor's shrewd thin face. He did not controvert the proposition.

"It's also borne in upon me," continued Baltazar, "that I'll have to scrap everything I've ever learned —and I've learned a hell of a lot—I'm an original mathematician, and I think I know more about Chinese language and literature than any man living. Oh! I'm not modest. I know exactly what my attainments are. As I say, I've learned a hell of a lot, and I'll have to scrap it all and just sit down and begin to learn the elementary things of existence, from the very beginning, all over again, like a schoolboy."

"Hear, hear!" said Pillivant, blatantly golf-accoutred, who had entered by the open door at the opening of Baltazar's avowal. "Now you're talking sense. I'm glad to see you realize how sinfully you've been wasting your time. Chinese! What's the good of Chinese? They've got to learn our language, not we theirs. I know. I went out to Hong Kong as a young man for five months on a building job. Every man-Jack talks pidgin-English.

That's good enough to get along with. Do you mean to say you've been spending your life learning Chinese? Of all the rotten things——"

"I'm aware, Mr. Pillivant," said Baltazar, with a grimace intended for a smile, which on his haggard face and beneath his bandaged head had a somewhat sinister aspect, "I'm aware that in your eyes I must appear rather a contemptible personage."

"Oh, not at all, old man," cried Pillivant. "Every one to his hobby. After all, it's a free country. Have a cigar."

He produced the portable gold casket. The doctor caught a swift glance from his patient and checked the generous offer.

"Not yet, Pillivant. A cigarette or two is all I can allow him."

Pillivant selected and lit a cigar. There was a span of silence. He looked out of window. Presently he began to praise the local golf-course, some mile or so distant. A natural course, with natural bunkers. The greens artificial—every sod brought from miles. Now the infernal Government had taken away their men. Not a soul in the place who understood anything about turf. Consequently the greens were going to the devil. It was an infernal shame to let golf-greens go to the devil. Golf was a national institution, necessary to maintain tired war-workers, like himself, in a state of national efficiency. But what could one expect from the rotten lot who constituted the so-called Government? Anyhow, you could still get some sort of a game. Baltazar must come round with him as soon as he could get about.

"I've never played golf in my life," said Baltazar.

"Never played——? Why, you seem to be out of everything."

Presently he swaggered out at the end of his monstrous cigar. Baltazar turned a weary head.

"Doctor," said he, "would they hang me very high if I slew my benefactor?"

As soon as sticking-plaster replaced the head bandage, the most impatient of men insisted on rising and going out into the world, clad in a borrowed suit of the detested Pillivant. His first care was to visit the Cottage Hospital, where Quong Ho, semi-conscious, still hung between life and death. Yielding to Baltazar's insistence, Dr. Rewsby had summoned in consultation the leading surgeon of the nearest town, the great cathedral city. From the point of view of the Faculty nothing could be simpler than Quong Ho's injuries. To bring a specialist from London would be a wicked waste of invaluable time. All that science could do was being done. The rest must be left to Nature. Baltazar was disappointed. Having an exile's faith in the wonders of modern surgery, he had thought that a few hundreds of pounds would have brought down a magician of a fellow from Harley Street with gleaming steel instruments, who could have mended Quong Ho's head in a few miraculous seconds. The ironical smile on the lips of Rewsby, for whom he had conceived respect and liking, convinced him of extravagant imaginings. He professed satisfaction, although sorely troubled by his queerly working conscience. Outside the ward, he grabbed Dr. Rewsby by the arm:

"Look here, Doctor," said he. "I want you to understand my position. I must pay some penalty for my egotistical folly in bringing Quong Ho to this infernal place. Oh, I know," he added quickly, checking with a gesture the doctor's obvious remon-

strance ; " I know it might have happened anywhere. But nowhere else than in that desert island of a farm would I have had to leave him alone for hours on the bare ground without medical assistance. It's my fault. I must pay for it."

" You've paid for it, my good friend," said Dr. Rewsby, " by your anxiety, by your—apparently—by your remorse. You've done everything that a human being could do in the circumstances."

" But don't you see, I brought the poor fellow to this through my selfish folly. You must let me pay for it in some way."

Said the doctor, a practical man, with the interests of his little struggling hospital at heart : " It's open to you to give a donation to the Cottage Hospital."

" All right," said Baltazar, flinging out an arm. " If he gets through there's a thousand pounds for the hospital."

" Good. And if he doesn't ? "

Baltazar drew a short breath, glanced down and askance beneath his shaggy brown eyebrows, and set a heavy, obstinate jaw. Then suddenly he flashed upon the doctor :

" If he dies you won't get a penny from me. But I'll give every cent I have in the world to the General Fund of the hospitals of the United Kingdom."

" Do you really mean that, Mr. Baltazar ? "

" Mean it ? Of course I mean it. I've done all kinds of rotten things in my life, but I've never broken my word. By George ! I haven't. If Quong Ho dies, the world will be the poorer, not only by a loyal soul, but by one of the most powerful mathematical intellects it has ever seen. And it's I "—he thumped his chest—" I who have robbed the world of him. And it's I who must pay the penalty."

"Pardon my impertinence," said Dr. Rewsby, drawing on his motoring gloves as a sign of ending the interview; "but have you generally conducted your life on these extravagant principles?"

"I don't quite understand——" replied Baltazar, stiffening.

"If Mr. Quong Ho dies—and I'm glad to say the probability is against his doing so—but if he does, you vow, as an act of penance, that you'll reduce yourself to a state of poverty and walk out into the world without one penny. Is that right?"

"Perfectly," said Baltazar.

"Well, as a medical man, with a hobby, a special interest in—let us say—psychology, I've been indiscreet enough to wonder whether this is the first time you've made such a quixotic vow. In fact, now I come to think of it, you made a similar one within two minutes of my first meeting you."

Baltazar met his eyes. "In fact, you want to know whether I'm not a bit mad."

"Not at all," laughed the doctor. "But I have a shrewd suspicion that the folly you bewail—the eccentric hermit life on the moor—was the result of some such rashly taken obligation."

"Suppose it was," said Baltazar; "what then?"

"I should say you were cultivating a very bad habit, and I should advise you to give it up."

He smiled, waved a friendly hand, and ran down the steps to his car. Baltazar watched him crank-up, slip to the wheel, and depart, without saying a word in self-defence. So far from offending him, the doctor had risen higher in his estimation. A man with brains, and the faculty of using them; a fellow of remarkable penetration; also of courage. He differentiated his outspokenness from Pillivant's

blatancy. The former was one man of intellect speaking frankly to another ; the latter. . . . He remembered the lecture, illustrated by quotations from the Chinese classics, which he had read to Quong Ho when his disciple, on his first visit to Water-End, had complained of the lack of manners of the local inhabitants. Why should he worry about Pillivant ? As he had said to Quong Ho : "*Rotten wood cannot be carved, and walls made of dirt and mud cannot be plastered.*" Never mind Pillivant. It was Rewsby, and Rewsby's quick summing-up of his psychological tendencies, that mattered. Not a human being had ever before presented him to himself in any just and intelligible way. Of course he had heard truths, pseudo-truths, dictated by violent prejudice, in his brief and disastrous married life. But they had all been superficial ; never gone to bed-rock. Since then he had been free as a god from criticism. And now came this shrewd, sagacious country doctor, who in the lightest, friendliest way in the world, put an unerring finger on the real unsound spot in his character.

". . . A very bad habit, and I should advise you to give it up."

Behind those commonplace words he knew lay a wise man's condemnation of his habitual dealing with life. He walked through the tiny town on his way to "The Cedars," unconscious of the curious interest of the inhabitants, to whom the sight of the mystery-enveloped and now bombed and head-bandaged tenant of Spendale Farm was a matter of eager, instantaneous mental photography, so that the picture could be reproduced as a subject for many weeks' future gossip, and he pondered deeply over Dr. Rewsby's criticism.

"Have you generally conducted your life on these extravagant principles ?"

He had. There was no denying it. A childish memory emerged from the mist of years. He must have been eight or nine. All about a dog. A puppy had destroyed a new paint-box, priceless possession, and in a fit of passion he had nearly beaten the puppy to death. And when his anger was spent and he grew terribly afraid, and sprawled down by the puppy, the puppy licked his hand. And he swore to God, as a child, that if the puppy lived and did not tell his father, he would never beat a dog again. The puppy lived, and, with splendid loyalty, never breathed a word to a human soul, and loved him with a love passing the love of women. And one day a neighbour's bad-tempered dog got into the kitchen garden and attacked him ; and though he had a stick by chance in his hand, he remembered his vow, and stood with folded arms and set teeth and let the dog bite his legs, until he was rescued by the gardener and carried indoors.

He remembered this, and a train of similar fantastic incidents culminating in his vow of solitude, and reviewed them all, in the light of Dr. Rewsby's criticism. What good, in the name of sanity, had his wild, quixotic resolves accomplished ? How had they benefited Spooner, for instance, to whom he had surrendered the Senior Wranglership ? During his brief stay in London he had had the curiosity to look up Spooner in reference books ; found him an Assistant Secretary in a Government office, Sir William Spooner, K.C.B. ; an honourable position, but a position which he would have attained—originally through the Civil Service examination—whether he had been second, fourth, tenth Wrangler in the Tripos. His, Baltazar's, idiot sacrifice had advanced Spooner's career not one millimetre : just as his self-denying ordinance in the realm of dogs had not benefited one jot the canine race—for

the mongrel retriever who had bitten him heroically arm-folded, had been shot the next day by the remorseful neighbour, who had been longing for an opportunity of getting conscientiously rid of an ill-conditioned cur.

And then there was his flight from Cambridge and Marcelle.

"Damn that doctor!" said he, striding along the road.

It was all very well to damn the doctor; but he had entered into a fresh engagement which, in spite of its newly revealed folly, he would break for nothing in the world. Yet what practical good would his little fortune accomplish scattered among the hundreds of hospitals of the United Kingdom? A pittance to each. And he himself, with all his gifts, thrown penniless upon a strange world at war, of what use would he be? His first necessarily animal impulse would be to prey upon society for the means of subsistence. Whereas, a free man, with his assured income, he could throw himself into the national struggle without thought of his own material needs.

Quong Ho's life acquired a new preciousness. He must live, if only to save him from this new absurdity to which he was pledged.

CHAPTER IX

ONCE more Baltazar stood within his granite enclosure and surveyed the scene of ruin and horror. He had hired a cart and driven over with three nondescript, elderly labouring men, who were now wandering aimlessly about the wreckage. Nothing seemed changed since he had last left it in the wake of the stretcher-borne body of Quong Ho, although the Water-End Fire Brigade, learning that the place was still on fire, and inspired by zeal and curiosity, had meanwhile come down with helmets, hatchets and hoses, and had drenched the interior of the house with water pumped from the well. There had been no attempt at salvage. The administrators of the derelict property had long since given up paying insurance premiums on the building, and Baltazar, so long alien to European life, and desirous of coming into as slight contact as possible with the outside world, had not troubled to insure the contents.

A foul, sickly smell tainted the still air. Mingled with the sour odour of the charred and sodden mess inside the dwelling, rose the miasma of corruption. Baltazar made a grimace of disgust. Before any salvage could be done the latter causes of offence must be removed. He summoned the men and gave his directions. They found the old mare's head and the dog and fragments of the goats, alive with the infinite horror of flies and other abominable life. There was

a cesspool handy. Throw them all in and clamp down the cast-iron lid. It did not matter. Nevermore would Spendale Farm be a human habitation. The men conveyed with their shovels the nameless things to the unhallowed resting-place. Baltazar would have liked to give the faithful Brutus, who had obviously rushed out of the house at the heels of Quong Ho and himself, decent burial. But not only had Brutus ceased to be Brutus, but Baltazar knew from experience the toil of digging in that granite-bound earth.

He left the men to their task, which they performed without compunction—had he not offered them the amazing sum of a pound each for their day's work ?—and plunged through the front door into the black chaos which was once his home. The sun streamed down upon unimaginable filth. He was wearing the clothes he had borrowed from Pillivant and at first he stepped warily. But every step landed him deeper in the damp carbonized welter, and at last he slipped and came down sprawling in the midst of it, so that when he rose he found himself fouled and begrimed from head to foot. He picked his way out again and stood on the front steps looking hopelessly in at the piled mass of nothingness.

He had listened to the report of the fire brigade's captain, and his doubtless correct theory that the desperate marauder had dropped his bombs almost simultaneously, one explosive and the other incendiary. The latter had caught the homestead fair and had caused the instant and terrific conflagration. Yet he had hoped. . . . He tried to hope still. The men would soon return from the cesspool and begin to shovel away the debris from the writing-table by the wall.

To get his brain into complete working order had been a matter of time. The shock of the explosion,

his wound, his enormous physical and mental effort on the memorable Wednesday, his puzzled amazement, the cataclysmic revelation of the war, his anxiety for Quong Ho, had knocked him out for a couple of days. When he recovered and regained mental grip of things, the only things he could grip at first were the staggering history of the war and the progress of Quong Ho. The two absorbing interests battened down fears that vaguely began to rise from deep recesses of his mind. But strength regained, Quong Ho out of immediate peril of death and the war a thing envisaged, practically understood, accepted, the fears burst their hatches and crowded round him, haunting and tormenting. And now he stared through the doorway of his house, with sinking heart, scarcely daring to hope that those fears should prove unfounded.

He glanced round. The men were spending inordinate time in the disposal of the carrion. Again he entered and stood in the midst of the rubbish. Only one section of bookcase remained, crazily askew. He had noted it on the Wednesday. He clambered gingerly towards it. The first slanting, half-charred, half-drenched book, whose title he made out, was *Queechy*. By the author of *The Wide, Wide World.* Next to it was *Flowering Shrubs of Great Britain,* the date of which he knew to be eighteen-fifty-four. His heart sank. Only the refuse of his famous deal with the second-hand bookseller remained. Just that little bit of section. The rest of his library was there —down there in the molten quagmire.

At last the men came, shovels on shoulder. He pointed out the place where his long table used to lie and bade them dig. He had brought, too, a shovel for himself, and he dug with them, violently, pantingly, distractedly, heaving the shovelfuls over his shoulders,

wallowing in the filth regardless of Pillivant's expensive clothes ; soon an object of dripping sweat and squalor, distinguishable only from his co-workers by his begrimed and bandaged head. The men began to pant and relax. He overheard as in a dream one of them saying, in a grumbling tone, something about beer. The sun beat fiercely down on the roofless site. He said :

" Go on digging. Dig all day. I'll stand you a couple of gallons apiece when you get home. If you're thirsty now, there's heaps of water."

The results of severe arithmetical calculation gleamed in each man's eye. The command over sixteen free pints of ale transcended the dreams of desire. They fell to again, working with renewed vigour.

The incendiary bomb had apparently fallen square on the northern end of the long north to south building and had scattered the original wall in which the great chimney-piece had been built and flung the granite outwards, obliterating the less solidly constructed kitchen and Quong Ho's quarters, and tearing down the side of the scullery. The lower courses of the rest of the main walls stood more or less secure. But the roof of dried tinder-thatch had fallen in ablaze, and everything beneath it had been consumed by fire. Nothing remained to distinguish Baltazar's bedroom at the southern end, once separated from the house-piece by a wooden partition reaching to the rafters, from the remainder of the awful parallelogram of disaster. The rigid mathematical lines of the low granite boundaries, with one end a heap of stony ruin, oppressed him as he dug with a sense of the ghastly futility of human self-imprisonment between walls. The position of the shapeless, ragged gaps that had once been windows alone guided him in his search.

The precious long deal table ran along the eastern wall. His writing-seat, surrounded by the most precious possessions of all, was situated in front of the north-east window—the long room had two windows, east and west, on each side. And it was just there where he used to sit, the happiest of men, in the midst of objective proof of dreams coming true, that chaos seemed to reign supreme.

"Go on, go on. Dig like hell. Every scrap of unburnt paper is a treasure to me. Look at every shovelful."

After hours of toil, they found a little heap of clotted fragments, the useless cores of burnt clumps of writing. Now and then a man would come with a few filaments, having shaken the charred edges free, and, looking wonderingly at the unintelligible outer leaf, would ask: "Is this any good to you, sir?" And Baltazar, his heart cold and heavy as a stone, would bid him cast away the mocking remnants of an all but unique copy of a Chinese classic.

It was over. The three men, having loyally earned their twenty shillings and the promised two gallons of beer, stood spent and drenched, like Baltazar himself, with grime and sweat.

"Anything more, sir?"

"Nothing," said Baltazar.

They shouldered their shovels and he his, and they marched away from the devastated place and drove back across the moor. Baltazar sat next the man who drove, in the front of the empty and futile cart, and said never a word. For the first time in his eager existence, defeat overwhelmed him. The work of a laborious lifetime had been destroyed in a few hours. With infinite toil, perhaps, he might recapture the main lines

of his thought-revolutionizing treatise on the Theory of Groups : his studies in the Analytical Geometry of Four-Dimensional Space. Perhaps. He had relied for his data on the innumerable notes and solutions of intricate problems which had cost the labour of many years. And these had gone. The world had hitherto wondered at two such scholar tragedies—Newton's *Principia* destroyed by the dog Diamond, the first volume of Carlyle's *French Revolution* burned by Mill's stupid housemaid. But in both cases only the finished product had perished. The data remained. The rewriting was but a painful business of recompilation. But with him, not only the more or less finished product, but the fundamental material was lost for ever. He shrank with dismay, almost with terror, at the thought of going through that infinite maze of accurate calculation and reasoning once more. Still, as far as the mathematics went, the palimpsest of the brain existed. Reconstitution was humanly possible. But with the Chinese editions—for most of it the material could only be found in remote libraries in China ; for much of it, the material no longer survived in the explored world.

He had come hoping against hope, arguing that great masses of manuscript on thick paper were practically indestructible by fire. The outsides, the edges might be burnt, but the vast bulk of inside sheets could be preserved. But he had not counted on the disruption and devouring effect of an incendiary bomb falling at the most precious end of the long deal working-table. Probably the whole room had been instantaneously carpeted thick with loose sheets, and the great stacks of manuscript had, as it were, been burnt in detail. Thus, for a while, on his hateful ride, he strove with conjecture. But what was the use of vain

imaginings? That which was done was done. The harvest of his life had been annihilated. If he died to-morrow, the world would be no richer by his existence than by that of any dead goat whose body had just been cast into the cesspool. To recover the harvest would cost him many years of uninspired drudgery. It would be a horrible re-living, an impossible attempt to re-capture the ardour of the pioneer, the thrills of discovery. For the first time he really felt the meaning of his age, the non-resilience of fifty. For the black present the very meaning of his life had been wiped out.

The men, wearied, befouled and thirsty, sat silent in the cart, each dreaming of the two gallons of beer that awaited him at the end of the journey. They knew they had been searching for papers; but to them valuable papers had only one signification; something perhaps to do with a bank; something which constituted a claim to money: they had discussed it during the half-hour midday interval for food. Wills, mortgages, title-deeds, they had heard of. The daughter of one of them, a parlourmaid in the house of a leading solicitor in the neighbouring cathedral city, ranking next to legendary London in majesty in the eyes of the untravelled Water-Enders, had told him that she had heard her master say, at dinner, that the contents of the tin boxes ranged around his office represented half a million of money. His announcement vastly impressed his colleagues, one of whom explained that all real wealth nowadays was a matter of bits of paper. He himself had fifteen pounds in the Savings Bank, but nothing to show for it but his Post Office book. Then the nature of their employer's frenzied quest became obvious to them all. They had found nothing. Their employer sat like a

ruined man. They pitied him and, in the delicacy of their English souls, refrained from intruding by speech upon his despair. In the meantime, there was no harm in surrendering their imaginations to the prospect of the incessant flow of delectable liquid down their parched throttles.

When they halted at the gate of The Cedars, Baltazar pulled out a sheaf of Treasury notes and gave each man thirty shillings. The extra ten shillings represented to their simple minds, not the promised two gallons of beer, but beer in perpetuity. This generosity on the part of one evidently ruined bewildered them. Baltazar strode down the drive leaving men impressed with the idea that he was a gentleman of the old school to whose service they were privileged to be devoted. They retired, singing his praises, being elderly men of a simple and tradition-bred generation.

His golf clubs on the lawn beside him, Pillivant, attired in imaginative golfing raiment, was taking the air in front of the house. He lay in an elaborate cane chair and smoked a great cigar. At the sight of Baltazar he started up.

"Holy Moses! You are in a devil of a mess."

"I'm afraid I've ruined your suit," said Baltazar. "If you would only let me know what your tailor charged for it——"

"The Sackville Street robber bled me eight guineas," said Pillivant, rather greedily.

"Here are eight pounds ten," said Baltazar, counting out his notes.

"Two shillings change," laughed Pillivant, handing him a florin.

"It's kind of you to relieve me from this particular embarrassment. The rest of my obligations I don't quite see how to meet."

"We won't charge you for board and lodging, old man, if that's what you mean. Take it and welcome. With regard to Rewsby and the nurse, you can do what you like. Meanwhile, you'll be glad to know that the ready-made kit you ordered from Brady & Co. have turned up this afternoon."

"I'd better clean myself up and put some of it on," said Baltazar.

"You had indeed," said Pillivant. "You look as if you had fallen into a sewer."

The previous day, obeying telephone instructions, a representative of a firm of ready-made clothiers in the cathedral city had called to take measurements and orders. This evening Baltazar was able to array himself once more in clothes of his own. By getting rid of borrowed garments he felt relieved of an immense burden.

"Well, how did you get on?" asked Pillivant heartily as they sat down to dinner. "Find anything?"

"Nothing but an appetite," replied Baltazar with a smile.

He could not tell this man of alien ideals and limited intellectual horizon of his irreparable loss, or hint his intolerable despair. The coarse husband and the common, over-bejewelled wife laughed at his sally, hoped the menu would furnish sufficiency of food. He was but to say the word, and they would kill the goose they were fattening up for Michaelmas. The jest lasted off and on through the meal. They pressed him to second and third helpings, joking, though genuinely hospitable. At first he strove to entertain them. Spoke picturesquely of his queer life in remotest China, where he lived the Chinese life and almost came to think Chinese thoughts. Mrs. Pillivant yawned behind bediamonded fingers. Pilli-

vant said, "Dam' funny," with complete lack of enthusiasm in the expletive, and as soon as he found a point of departure, set forth on the story of a discreditable grievance against the War Office. He couldn't personally examine every plank of timber supplied. It had all been passed by their own inspector. If they sent down a young idiot of a subaltern who didn't know the difference between green pine and green cheese, it was their affair, not his. He had got his contract, and there it was. Their talk about an inquiry was all nonsense. The War Office ought to employ business men on business errands. He had just gone in, with another firm, on a big contract for an aerodrome in the North of England. Some political Paul Pry had discovered—so he said—that it could be built for half the money. Rot. Patriotism was one thing, but running your business at a loss was another. The patriotic contractor must earn his living, like anybody else. Why should his wife and family starve? In righteous indignation he poured himself a bumper of 1904 Bollinger, which he drained before finishing the whole grouse which as a fifth course had been set before him. The entire system was one vast entanglement of red tape, he continued. We were out to beat Germany. How could we, when every effort was strangled by the red tape aforesaid? Germany had to be beaten. How? By British pluck and British enterprise. Pluck, by God! Were we not showing it now on the Somme? And enterprise? He poured out more Bollinger. If the fool Government would let business men do business things in a business way, we would get the Germans beaten and fawning for peace in a fortnight. There was nothing wrong with England. He was English, through and through.

"Although I won't deny," said he, with an incipient hiccough, "that my mother spoke Yiddish. No, no, my dear"—he turned with a protesting wave to his wife—"I want to make things perfectly clear and above-board to our old friend Baltazar. I've got a coat of arms—look up Pillivant in any book on Heraldry and you'll see it—that goes back to Edward the Something—not the Seventh. I'm English, I tell you. But I'm not responsible for my mother, who came from Posen. Now, what do you do to prevent typhoid? You inoculate. I'm inoculated. That's my fortunate position. I'm inoculated against Prussianism and all it stands for. Could I be a pacifist or a conscientious objector? No. I'm immune from the disease of pro-Germanism. As I've been telling you, I'm English through and through, and I'm spending my life and my fortune in seeing that Old England comes out on top."

To prove the expenditure of fortune he seized a fresh bottle of Bollinger which the butler had just opened and filled Baltazar's glass and his own.

"If you don't drink, you're a pro-German. To hell with the Kaiser."

Baltazar drank the toast politely and patriotically; the merest sip of champagne; for beyond the first brandy and soda which had been poured down his parched and exhausted throat, he had kept his vow of abstinence, in spite of his host's continued pressure. He felt sure of himself now; wondered how he could ever have brought himself to the present Pillivant condition. He liked Pillivant less and less; yet he began to be fascinated by the truth concerning Pillivant which rose unashamed to the surface of the wine-cup.

When the cigars were put on the table, Mrs. Pillivant rose. Baltazar opened the door for her to pass out.

On the first occasion of his doing so, the first time he had come down to dinner, she had been puzzled, and asked him whether he was not going to smoke with her husband. She still did not seem to understand the conventional courtesy. When the door was closed behind her, Pillivant drew a great breath of relief.

"Pity you won't drink," said he, refilling his glass. "We might have made a night of it. And this is such good stuff, too. About the most expensive I could buy."

After that, impelled by the craving for self-revelation, he took up his parable again, and entertained his guest with many details of opinions, habits and actions, that had not been fit for wifely ears. When the stream of confidence at last grew maudlin, Baltazar, pleading an invalid's fatigue after a heavy day, bade him good night.

"I've been so long out of touch with English life," said he, "that it is most interesting to me to meet a typical Englishman."

Pillivant clapped him heavily on the shoulder.

"You're right, my boy," he asserted thickly. "A downright, patriotic John Bull Englishman. The sort of stuff that's winning the war for you, and don't you make no mistake about it."

Baltazar went to bed pondering over his host. The annihilation of his own life's work did not bear thinking about. That way lay madness. Pillivant brought a new interest. For all his adventurous journeyings he had not met the Pillivant type—or if he had fortuitously encountered it, he had passed it by in academic scorn. Had his ironical remark any basis of truth? Was Pillivant after all typical of the forces behind the war in this unknown modern England? Vulgarity, bluster, self-seeking, corruption, hypocrisy? The old

aristocratic order changing into something loathsomely new? Pillivant posed as the successful man, engaged in vast affairs, working night and day for his country—he was only snatching, he had explained, a three weeks' rest at this little country shanty which he had not seen for nearly a year. The luxury of the "shanty" proved his success; proved the magnitude of his dealings with the Government. So far there was no brag. But how came it that the Government put itself into the hands of such a man, openly boastful of his exploitation of official ineptitude? He could not be unique. There must be hundreds, thousands like him. Was he, in sober earnest, a typical modern Englishman? If so, thought Baltazar, God help England.

And yet England must have still the qualities that made Cressy, Poitiers, Agincourt ring in English ears through the centuries: the qualities of the men who followed Drake and Marlborough and Nelson and Raglan. . . . That very morning he had read of British heroism on the Somme battlefield, and had been thrilled at realizing himself merged into the unconquerable soul of his race.

He threw off his bedclothes—rose—flung the curtains wide apart, and thrust out all the room's casement windows not already opened, and looked out into the starlit summer night.

No. It was impossible for England to be peopled with Pillivants. They were the fishers in troubled waters, the blood-suckers, the parasites, the excrescences on an abnormal social condition. But why were they allowed to live? What was wrong? Who were the rulers? Their very names were but vaguely familiar to him. And he had read of strikes; of men earning—for the proletariat—fabulous wages, striking for more pay, selfishly, criminally (so it seemed to his

unversed and aghast mind), refusing to provide the munitions of war for lack of which their own flesh and blood, earning a shilling a day, might be slaughtered in hecatombs. He threw himself into a chair.

"My God!" said he, "I must get out of this and see what it all means."

After a few moments he suddenly realized that he had pulled on his socks, as though he were going, there and then, at midnight, to plunge into the midst of the bewildering world at war.

CHAPTER X

QUONG HO sitting up, taking plentiful nourishment and definitely pronounced out of danger, Baltazar presented his cheque for a thousand pounds to Dr. Rewsby, and thanked God for the preservation of Quong Ho's life and his own fortune. He also listened with much interest to Quong Ho's apologetics for leaving him in ignorance of the war. For such exact obedience and perfect fidelity reproaches would have been unjust, even had remorse for his own folly not have precluded them.

"And now, my dear fellow," said he—he was sitting by the bed in the airy, sun-filled ward of the Cottage Hospital—"tell me what you would like to do."

"I don't care what he would like to do," said Dr. Rewsby. "What he has got to do is to stay here quiet and recover from the shock and mend up, and not worry his mind with the war, or mathematics, or the condition of your underclothes."

"Quong Ho shall never wash a shirt of mine again," declared Baltazar. "Henceforth he is the master of his destiny. I'm talking not of now, but of the future. So far as I can manage it, he can do what he jolly well likes. That's why I put the question to him. So, Quong Ho, never mind this excellent medicine man, who can't see beyond his nose and doesn't want to, because all he's concerned with is getting you well—

never mind him, but tell me what most in the world you would like to do."

"Sir," said Quong Ho, "if you desire to dispense with my personal services, which I have always regarded it as a privilege to render to my benefactor, may I dare to formulate an ambition which has hitherto been but an idle dream?"

Dr. Rewsby knitted his grizzled brows and dragged Baltazar away from the bed.

"Does he always talk like that?" he whispered.

"Did you think he would express himself with 'Muchee likee topside,' and that sort of thing?"

"No; but he talks like an archbishop."

"Then perhaps," grinned Baltazar, "you'll understand why I've insisted on his being treated as my closest friend."

He returned to the bed. "I'm sorry, Quong Ho. What's this famous ambition of yours?"

Quong Ho looked up at him unsmiling, with a dog-like yearning in his slanting eyes.

"If I could obtain the mathematical degree of the University of Cambridge——"

"If you went in for the Tripos now, you would wipe the floor with everybody.—Cambridge! That's a wonderful idea." He stuck his hands behind him in the waistband of his trousers and strode about for a moment or two, his eyes illuminated. "A splendid notion! You can begin where I leave off. I'll work up all the stuff that's gone, and put it into your hands, and you'll continue my life's work. Nay more, you'll consummate it. Cambridge! The very thing! Damn China! Any fool can teach young China the Binomial Theorem and Trigonometry. But there's only one Quong Ho, the pupil and intellectual heir of John Baltazar, in the world. Yes.

You'll go to Cambridge, and by the Lord Harry! won't there be fluttering of dove-cotes!"

He stopped suddenly in his enthusiastic outburst and his brow darkened. "Wait a bit. Perhaps you don't realize that Cambridge is a matter of at least three years?"

"If it were twenty years it would matter little," said Quong Ho.

"There's Latin and Greek—compulsory. I was forgetting."

"Greek," replied Quong Ho, "I presume I could readily acquire. As for Latin, I think I am acquainted with the grammar and I have already read the interesting Commentaries of Julius Cæsar on the Gallic War."

Baltazar sank into a chair.

"Latin! You've learned Latin? When? How?"

Quong Ho explained apologetically that the simultaneous excitation of mind over the quotation at the head of the papers of *The Rambler*, and the discovery in the lowest rubbish shelf in the library of an old Latin grammar and a copy of the *De Bello Gallico*, had inaugurated his study of the Latin tongue. He had procured, not without difficulty, owing to the limited intelligence of the young lady in charge, a Latin dictionary, through the miniature bookshop in Water-End.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Baltazar. "I'm just damned. And now, do you mind telling me why you never mentioned a word of it to me?"

He looked fierce and angry. Quong Ho replied in his own tongue. How could the inconsiderable worm that was his illustrious lordship's servant presume to importune him with his inferior and unauthorized pursuits?

"I could have taught you twice as much in half the time," said Baltazar.

Quong Ho professed regret. He had also bought, he said, the works of the poets Virgil and Horace, but had found peculiar difficulty in translating them.

The new conception of Quong Ho as an independent purchaser of commodities set Baltazar's mind on a different track. He had paid Quong Ho wages—or rather Quong Ho had paid himself. He started up from his chair.

"Good Lord! I've only just thought of it. All the money you must have had on the Farm is lost. How much was it?"

"A trifling sum—a pound or two. It does not matter," replied Quong Ho.

"But you've been drawing a salary all the time. What's become of it? You couldn't possibly have spent it all."

"I have invested it in British War Loan," said Quong Ho.

"Quong Ho," said Baltazar, standing over him, with hands thrust deep into his trouser-pockets, "you are immense."

He went away, his head full of Quong Ho.

"Doctor," said he, "I thought that if there ever was a Westerner who had got to the soul of the Chinaman, that man was I. Yet the more I see of Quong Ho the less do I know what queer mental workings and strange secrecies those soft, faithful eyes conceal. He kept me in absolute ignorance of the war, he learned Latin in the next room to me, without my having the faintest idea of it, and he has invested his money in War Loan. Of course, the philosophy of it all is perfectly lucid to him. In a way, I can get at the logic of it. But one wants to be wise not after but

before the event. What surprise is he going to spring on me next?"

"Perhaps you've been nurturing an Oriental Caruso in your bosom," the doctor suggested.

"That—no!" laughed Baltazar. "Chinese vocal chords aren't built that way. But, for all I know, he may have a complete critical knowledge of the strategy of the war. The confounded fellow learning Latin! That's what I can't get over. And calmly investing in War Loan!"

"You don't think he may cut everything and slip away to China?"

"No," said Baltazar seriously. "That at least I'm sure of. The tremendous quality of the Chinaman is his loyalty. The scrupulousness of his obedience is a thing beyond your conception. That's why he allowed no whisper of the war to reach me. Quong Ho would never be guilty of ingratitude. That you, Dr. Rewsby, should pick my pocket is far more possible. In fact, Quong Ho would cheerfully die this moment in order to save my life. That I know. But within those limits of utter devotion, God alone knows the weird workings of his celestial mind." He pulled out his pipe and filled it. "I thought I knew a lot. Now I'm being knocked flat and beginning to realize that I know nothing at all, and that everything I've ever learned isn't worth a tinker's curse."

"Perhaps," said the doctor, after a hesitating glance, "you have put your foot on the first rung of the ladder of wisdom."

Baltazar broke into a great laugh.

"I wish," said he, "I had met more men like you. They would have done me good. You have the most comforting way in the world of telling me that I'm the Great Ass of the Universe."

His head mended, his fears concerning Quong Ho at rest, his decision taken to send Quong Ho to Cambridge, nothing more kept him in the backwater of the little moorland town. He was for London, for the full stream of national thought and energy. What he would do there he did not know. He would learn. He would at least set his heart throbbing in unison with the heart of the Empire. He packed his newly purchased suit-case with his scanty wardrobe, bade farewell to the detested though embarrassingly hospitable Pillivants, and took train to London with the high hopes of a boy.

His first taste of the metropolis was exhilarating. Here was a new world. Every porter at the railway-station, every newsvendor, every street urchin, was the possessor of accumulated knowledge and experience of which he, John Baltazar, was denied a share. He read strange wisdom in the eyes of working girls and slatternly women. He bought all the evening papers, reeking, as they seemed, with the pregnant moment's actuality. He went to a bookseller's and bought every book and pamphlet bearing on the war. He would have an orgy of information. He would pluck the heart of the world's mystery of blood and sacrifice.

But where to begin? If he had but one solitary acquaintance in London, who could put him into the way of understanding, his course would be simple. But he found himself absolutely alone in an infinite mass of units, knit together by complexities of common ties.

What he saw and felt, in his first eager search, reduced to dwindling point the petty tragedy of his own life. For greater issues were at stake than the revolution of mathematical thought by a new Theory of Groups. In the wholesale destruction of what were

thought to be the immortal works of man, the loss of a few Chinese manuscripts counted as little as that of paper bags for buns. For excursions into the geometry of Four-Dimensional Space, or scholarly translation of the mild and benign Chinese classic, *The Book of Rewards and Punishments*, the world would have no use for another half-century. In face of the realities with which London confronted him, he felt that he had devoted his life to the pursuit of shadows.

If only he could grasp these realities. If only he could merge himself into them, become part and parcel of them, bring his intellect and his bodily strength into the stupendous machine which he saw at work.

Then he saw himself, by his own actions, condemned to sit and watch, an inactive spectator of the great drama. His loneliness fell upon him like a doom. He realized the uselessness of his age. He had as much place in modern London as any chance inhabitant of Mars. He who had dared the untrodden recesses of the Far Eastern world, haughtily asserting his sympathetic right of citizenship, felt, after a day or two, a terror of modern London. It was too vast, too unknown, too strange : a city at war, unlike any city he had ever seen. Youth, in civilian attire, had disappeared from its face. The unfamiliar dirty brown uniform filled the streets. He had read of khaki, was vaguely aware of it as the service uniform of the British Army ; he had come across the tropical drill material which had clothed the troops in Hong Kong, but his mind preoccupied with interests remote from military affairs had barely registered the impression. His traditional and therefore instinctive conception of the soldier in the London streets was a thing in swaggering scarlet. He missed the scarlet. It took

him some time to accommodate his mental vision to the military reality of the dun-coloured hordes of men that thronged the Strand, Whitehall, and Piccadilly. Soldiers, too, slopped about in an extraordinary kit of blue jean and red ties. He did not grasp the fact that these were wounded men wearing hospital uniform, until he passed the Westminster Hospital and saw some of them taking the air on the terrace. After the first day's wanderings he dined at his crowded hotel, a bewildered man. In London itself he had beheld an army. Scarcely a table in the vast restaurant showed no man in uniform among its occupants. He contrasted the place with his last pre-war impression. Then every man, young or old, had been impeccably attired in the white tie and white waistcoat of high convention. Not a woman then who was not gowned as for some royal festival. Now the outward and visible signs of gilded youth had vanished. Even elderly bucks wore plain dinner-jackets and black ties—his own sloppily fitting, ready-made dress-suit seemed ultra-ceremonious. Here and there were exquisitely dressed women ; but here and there, too, were dowdy ladies unblushing under obviously cheap hats. And men with bandaged heads came in, and legless men on crutches ; and at the next table a one-armed man depended for the cutting up of his food on the ministrations of a girl. And away over the other side of the room he saw a man, his breast covered with ribbons, carried pick-a-back by a brother officer to his appointed place. No one seemed to take notice of the unusual. Scarcely a casual glance lingered on the pair. At no table visible was there a break in the talk and the laughter. Baltazar leaned back in his chair and gasped at the realization that the incident was a commonplace of modern life.

His heart throbbed with pity for these maimed men, some of them boys fresh from school ; then with pride in their English courage and gaiety. He looked round the room curiously and, in his fancy, identified several Pillivants. They generally sat two or three at a table and drank champagne and leaned over, heads together, as they talked. But the impression they made was effaced by that of youth : youth pervaded the place ; youth whole and gloriously insolent ; youth maimed and defiant ; youth predominating, too, among the women, with its eyes alight and cheeks aglow ; youth nerved to war, taking it as the daily round, the common task. It was some new planet in which Baltazar found himself, peopled with beings of dimly conjectured interests and habits of thought.

After dinner, the loneliest soul in London, he took his hat and thought to go for a stroll. He emerged from the brightly lit vestibule into Tartarean darkness and forbidding silence. Instead of the once glad stream of life, a few vague forms flitted by on the pavement. Now and then a moving light and a whirr denoted the passing of a taxi-cab on the roadway. At first he stood outside the hotel door, baffled, until he remembered that he had heard of the darkened thoroughfares. The sky being overclouded, London was denied that night the kindly help of stars. Baltazar saw it in all its blackness, and shrank involuntarily as from the supernatural. He laughed and started. Soon, when his sight grew accustomed to the blackness, his senses were arrested and fascinated by the wonder of this veiled heart of the Empire, by its infinite tones of gloom, by its looming masses of building melting upwards into black nothingness, by the vista of narrow streets, where at the end a dim lamp gave them a note of sinister mystery. But his walk did not last

long. As he was crossing a street, an unseen and unheard taxi-cab just swerved in time to miss him by a hair's-breadth. He felt the wind of it on the back of his neck and caught the curse of the driver. After that he lost his nerve. The re-crossing of Trafalgar Square became a perilous and breathless adventure. He was glad to find himself again in the light and the safe normality of the hotel.

No. London was not for him. He found himself even more a stranger than during his last disastrous sojourn. There seemed to be no chance for him to be anything else than a stray number in an hotel. He felt like a bit of waste cog-wheel seeking a place in a perfect machine.

"A few days more of this and I'll go mad," said he.

He did not go mad, but at last, with the instinct of the homing pigeon, fled to Cambridge. There at least would he be able to pick up some threads of life left straggling twenty years ago. Only when he had gone half-way did he remember that it was the Long Vacation, so long had he lived indifferent to times and seasons. Doubtless, however, the Long Vacation Term was in progress as usual and the official dons in residence. But who would there be, after twenty years, in spite of the proverbial longevity of dons? Who now was master of his college? When he left, Fordyce was getting a bit elderly. Why, of course, by now, if alive, he would be over ninety. Fordyce must have been gathered long ago to his fathers. Who could have succeeded him? Why hadn't he looked it up in a book of reference? It seemed stupid to return to his own college without knowing the name of the master. Who were the prominent people?

Westgrove, the senior tutor ; Barrett, senior dean ; Withington, junior dean ; Raymond, bursar ; Smith, Hartwell, Grayson, Mostyn—men more or less of his own standing ; Sheepshanks, the famous mathematical coach upon whose shoulders had fallen the mantle of the immortal Routh (maker of senior wranglers), and his own private tutor and friend. There would be somebody there out of all that lot, at any rate. He felt more hopeful.

A grizzled porter threw his suit-case into a hansom cab, a welcome survival of his youth, and in answer to his query whether the "Blue Boar" was still in existence, stared at him as though he had questioned the stability of the great court of Trinity or Matthews, the grocer.

"The 'Blue Boar,' sir ? Why, of course, sir."

So to that ancient hostelry Baltazar drove down Trumpington Street. It seemed all new and perky until he came to the great landmark, the Fitzwilliam Museum. Then in a flash he recaptured his Cambridge ; Peterhouse on his left, Pembroke on his right ; then the three-sided, low, bricked court of St. Catharine's facing the dignified stone front and gateway of Corpus ; then the amazing grandeur of King's College Chapel—he craned his head out and drank in its calm loveliness ; then the Senate House ; on the right the shops of the King's Parade, just as they used to be ; then Caius, and the cab drew up at the "Blue Boar."

He secured a room and went out again to fill his lungs with the atmosphere of the beloved place, his soul with its beauty and its meaning. He wandered, at first like a man distraught, his eyes far above the pavement, wrapt in the familiar glories of stone and brick ; the majesty of Trinity, the twin-towered,

blazoned gateway of St. John's, the venerable round church of the Holy Sepulchre. . . . He walked on past Sidney, Christ's, Emmanuel ; turned up Downing Street. At the sight of the vast piles of modern science buildings, he came down to earthly things. Thenceforward he became aware of something new and strange and alien to the academic spirit that once spread its brooding wings over the town. The quiet streets were filled with soldiery. Khaki, khaki, on roads and pavements ; khaki, khaki, in college courts. There seemed to be regiments of rank and file. Officers, gaitered and spurred, clanked along as in a garrison city. Much youth, whose status he could not determine, wearing a white band round its cap, laughed and jested, undergraduate-like, on its way. He wandered through the river-nest of colleges, Queens', Clare, Trinity Hall, through courts and gateways, and it was the same story of military occupation. A bevy of nurses flitted about the courts of King's. A group of men in hospital blue lounged over the balustrade of Clare Bridge.

It was a wondrous metamorphosis. Almost the only young men in civilian attire were a few Indian students. He came across them carrying notebooks under their arms, on their return from morning lecture. Lectures, then, were still going on. College authorities were still in residence ; he had, in fact, passed many unmistakable dons. But dons and Indians seemed but the relics of a past civilization. In a spasm of amazement he realized that the University, as he had conceived it, a seat of learning, no longer existed. The three thousand young men, the average undergraduate population, who afforded the University its reason of being, were fighting for their country or being trained in the arts of war. Yet the colleges

through which he passed seemed to be alive. No sign anywhere of desolation or decay. Pembroke and Emmanuel had the appearance of barracks. He strode hither and thither, in his impetuous way, his mind exercised with the wonder of it all ; saw Midsummer Common filled with troops at drill, found himself on the river. The tow-path was overgrown with grass. War everywhere. The very boat-houses were incorporated into the military system. On the familiar front of his own college boat-house was nailed an inscription. Such and such a regiment. Officers' mess.

The University was at war. Not for the first time in its glorious history. Troops had garrisoned his college in the Civil Wars. It had melted down its plate for Charles the First. If it had possessed a boat-house it would have given it loyally to the King. Yet that was between two and three hundred years ago. Baltazar had the modern and not the archæological instinct. Conditions were different in those days. But now, in the second decade of the twentieth century, to be confronted with his remote, innocent college boat-house thus drawn, a vital though tiny unit, into the war, spurred his imagination to a newer comprehension of the world-convulsion to which he had been but recently awakened. If the war could reach and grip a pretty balconied shed on the River Cam, in what other infinite ramifications through the whole of the national life did its tentacles not extend ? As he retraced his steps to the town, the bombing of Spendale Farm and the commandeering of his college boat-house appealed to him as the two most significant facts of the war.

He stood in the gateway under the groined roof by the porter's lodge of his own college. The porter on

duty, a young, consumptive-looking man, appeared at the door. Baltazar said :

" I am an old member of the college, and I've been abroad for many years. I wonder if there's anybody in residence whom I used to know."

" It depends upon who you want to see, sir."

Baltazar searched the young man's face. " First " —he snapped finger and thumb—" yes, first, where's Westmacott ? "

" My father, sir ? He's feeling his age, and having a bit of a holiday. Did you know him, sir ? "

" Of course I did. He was senior porter when I was an undergraduate. He must be about a hundred and ten."

" No, sir, only seventy-five," smiled the young man.

" Who's Master now ? "

" Dr. Barrett, sir."

" Is he up ? "

" Not for the moment, sir."

" What about Mr. Westgrove ? "

" Westgrove ? Oh yes, sir. He died a long time ago. When I was a boy, sir."

" Well, who is there in residence ? "

The younger Westmacott rattled off a string of unfamiliar names.

" I'm talking of twenty years ago," said Baltazar. " What about Mr. Raymond ? "

" He's Professor of Economics at—at one of those new sort of universities, sir."

The Cambridge-trained servitor's tone expressed both regret at Mr. Raymond's decline and scorn of the new sort of universities.

" Mr. Sheepshanks—— ? "

" Dr. Sheepshanks now, sir. *Honoris causa.* Just before the war."

"Well, Dr. Sheepshanks then," said Baltazar, rather impatiently.

"Oh, he's always here, sir. He's senior tutor."

"Is he in?"

"I haven't seen him go out to-day. I'm pretty sure he's in, sir. Letter E, New Court."

"Thanks," said Baltazar, and went in search of Sheepshanks, through the familiar courts.

When he stood at the doorway of Letter E and read the name, white-lettered on black, "Dr. Sheepshanks," he remembered that here Sheepshanks had lived thirty years ago. Probably the same rooms. On the second floor. He mounted the winding wooden stairs. Yes: above the unsported oak (the infallible porter was right) the name of Dr. Sheepshanks was inscribed. He paused for an instant before knocking at the inner door, because all his youth came surging back on him. He saw himself a freshman, tapping with nervous knuckles at the almost sacred portal of the famous coach, the fount of all mathematical science, the legendary being who had the power to make senior wranglers at will. He saw himself the third year man, rapping confidently, secure in the knowledge that Sheepshanks had staked his reputation on his triumph. He saw himself smiting the door defiantly, after the lists had been published . . . "Spooner, Jenkins, Baltazar . . ." Spooner had read with Roberts of Trinity; but Jenkins had been a Sheepshanks man. . . . He saw himself, many and many a time afterwards, when he had stepped into his universally acknowledged own, thumping it with friendly familiarity. That heavy, black oak door, invitingly open, held the secrets of his vivid youth.

At last he knocked, but the knock—so it seemed

—was devoid of character. A voice—the same sharp, nasal voice—it sent him back again to freshman's days—cried :

"Come in."

He opened the door, stood on the threshold. The back of Sheepshanks, working at his desk by the great window looking over the master's garden, met his eyes, across the large library table that occupied the centre of the room. It was the same old table—the table at which he had sat with the superior first batch of pupils, during his undergraduate days. How often then and in after days he had entered on that cracked "Come in," and seen that lean back and bowed head, and waited the few seconds, as he was doing now, for the owner to finish his sentence and swing round in his chair—the same old swivel-chair. After the same second or two, Sheepshanks turned round and, as in one movement, rose to his feet. He was a small, brown, wrinkled, clean-shaven man in the early sixties, with eyes masked by thick myopic lenses, spectacles set in gold rims. His hair short, but curly, gleamed a dazzling white. It was a shock of memory to Baltazar to realize that when he had last seen it, it was raven black.

"Yes?" said Sheepshanks inquiringly.

Baltazar strode past the library table with outstretched hand.

"Don't pretend you've never seen me before, Sheepshanks."

Sheepshanks made a step forward, peered through his glasses, then recoiled and gasped :

"Baltazar!"

"You've hit it, my dear old friend. I'm not a ghost. I'm live flesh and blood. I'm John Baltazar right enough."

"God bless my soul!" said Sheepshanks. "We thought you must be dead. Do sit down."

Baltazar laughed as he turned to deposit hat and stick on a side-table; then he came and clapped both his hands on the elderly don's lean shoulders.

"You apostle of primness! Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Of course I'm glad, my dear fellow. Exceedingly glad. But your sudden resurrection rather takes one's breath away." He smiled. "Let us both sit down, and you can tell me all about it."

CHAPTER XI

"IF I don't smoke, I'm afraid I can't talk," said Baltazar.

Sheepshanks smiled politely. "You remember my little weakness? But pray smoke. I've got used to it of late years. Times change, and we with them."

Baltazar filled and lit his pipe.

"A couple of weeks ago," said he, "I had all but completed two epoch-marking mathematical treatises. I had got systems and results you good people here had never dreamed of. I had also stuff in the way of Chinese scholarship that would have been a revelation to the Western world. Then German aircraft dropped bombs on my house, a hermitage in the middle of a moorland, and wiped out the labour of a lifetime. They also nearly killed a young Chinaman whom I regard as an extraordinary mathematical genius and about whom I want to consult you. They also, thereby, revealed to me a fact of which I was entirely unaware, namely, that the war had been going on for a couple of years."

He leaned back in his chair and drew a few contented puffs. His host passed a hand over perplexed brows and leaned forward.

"I'm very sorry," said he, in his precise, nasal voice, "to appear stupid. But you have put forward half a dozen such amazing propositions in one breath that I can't quite follow you."

A smile gleamed in Baltazar's eyes. "I thought that would get you," he remarked placidly. "But it's an accurate presentment of my present position."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Sheepshanks. "But you surely haven't been living a recluse on a moor for the last twenty years?"

"Oh no," replied Baltazar. "Eighteen of them I spent in China. I went out straight from here."

"To China? Dear me," said Sheepshanks. "What an extraordinary place to go to from Cambridge."

"Didn't anybody guess where I had vanished to?"

"Not a soul, I assure you. Your disappearance created a sensation. Quite a sensation. A painful one, because you were a man we could ill afford to lose."

"It's good of you to say so. But it's odd that no one seemed to be interested enough in me to reason out China. You all knew I was keen on Chinese." He cast a swift glance around the book-shelves that lined the room, and shot out an arm. "I shouldn't be surprised if that's my little handbook—*Introduction to the Language, on a Scientific Basis.*"

Sheepshanks's myopic vision followed Baltazar's pointing finger.

"Yes. It's somewhere there. You haven't changed much from the creature of flashes that you used to be."

"It happens to be the only yellow-backed book on the shelf. To say nothing of the purple dragon, which is grossly incorrect and unmeaning. It jumps to the eyes. Just as my going to China ought to have jumped to the eyes of everybody."

"I'm afraid it didn't. Perhaps we were too much paralysed with dismay."

"I often tried to guess what you all thought about

it," said Baltazar. "A human being can't escape his little vanities. It was like being dead and wondering what the dickens people were saying about one."

"We didn't know what to say," replied Sheepshanks. "We had no precedents on which to base any conclusions. We looked for motives for flight and we could find none. We sought for possible imperative objectives, and one so apparently uncompelling as China never occurred to us. Here to-day, gone to-morrow. You vanished, 'like a snowflake on a river.' To see you now, after all these years, looking scarcely a day older, is an experience which I must confess is bewildering."

"I suppose you thought me mad or a fugitive from justice, or one driven by the Furies."

"We didn't know what to think, and that's the truth of it," replied Sheepshanks.

"Well, call it the last. I wasn't very old and hardened. Perhaps I mistook Mrs. Grundy with an upraised umbrella for one of the ladies who played the devil with Orestes and Company. I had quite decent reasons then for clearing out. Whether I was wise or not is another matter. Anyhow, I cleared, sank my identity and went out to China. After eighteen years I came back. The rest I've told you in a sort of pemmican form."

"I don't deny," said Sheepshanks, "that I am still somewhat confused."

"All right," said Baltazar. "You sit there, and I'll tell you what I can. Anyhow, I'll try to explain why I'm here. I'll begin from the day I sailed for China."

The primness of Edgar Sheepshanks, D.SC., relaxed, to some extent, during Baltazar's story. Like Dominie Sampson's "Prodigious!" his "Wonderful! wonderful!" punctuated the intervals. To him who had

stuck limpet-like to the same academic walls, Baltazar appeared a veritable modern Ulysses. He sighed, wishing that he too had performed the scholarly travels through that far land of Mystery, the Cathay of ancient times, which was now the little better known interior of modern China; he sighed, as he did when gallant youth returned from high adventure in that land of equal mystery, the Front. Baltazar was half through his tale when there entered a venerable man-servant, Sheepshanks's gyp for innumerable years. At the sight of the guest he started back with the dropped jaw of one who sees a ghost.

"Mr. Baltazar!"

"Lord, it's Punter!"

It was odd how names came back from the moss-grown recesses of memory. He shook hands with the old man.

"Yes, it's me. And you're looking just as young as ever. I recognized you at once. And look here, Punter, if you want to do me a service, just spread the news about Cambridge. If I've got to go through an Ancient Mariner or Wandering Jew explanation every time I meet anyone, it'll eventually get on my nerves."

"I'm sure every one will rejoice to have you back, sir," said the gyp.

"Punter's bringing my lunch. I hope you'll stay and share it with me," said Sheepshanks politely.

"Delighted," said Baltazar, and the old man having retired, he went on with his tale.

He continued it over lunch in the next room, a homelier chamber, where Sheepshanks kept his choice books and his two or three good Italian pictures and a few ivories and photographs of nephews and nieces. It was during the meal that he noticed for the first time a lack of effusiveness on the part of his host. Not that

he had expected the prim Sheepshanks to throw his arms about him and dance with joy ; but he had hoped for more genial signs of welcome. After all, he reflected, he had let the college down very badly ; possibly he was still unforgiven. Well, if that was so, he would have to earn forgiveness.

In his tale he had reached the first visit to London.

" I was out of my element, as you perceive," said he, " and then something happened which made me decide suddenly to go into seclusion for two or three years. Real seclusion. I don't do things by halves. In some remote spot where not a whisper of the outer world could ever reach me."

" But what kind of thing could have happened to cause you to take such an extraordinary step ? " asked Sheepshanks.

Thought Baltazar : " If I tell him the real reason, he'll turn into a pillar of frozen don." Besides, he had not the faintest intention of opening his soul to Sheepshanks, even though the latter should have enacted the part of the father of the Prodigal Son. He waved the question aside.

" Nothing of any importance. Just one of the idiot trifles that always seem to arise and deflect my course through life. The main point is that I found the place I wanted, and went there with Quong Ho."

Luncheon had been cleared away and he had finished a couple of pipes before he came to the end of his narrative.

" So now you see my position," said he.

" I think I do," replied Sheepshanks.

" My whole life-work has gone—except that part of it which exists in the cultivated brain of my remarkable young Chinaman. There seems to be no place for me in London, where everybody's fitted into the war,

where I'm simply dazed and unwanted. So I've come here—if only to find something left of my old life to attach myself to."

"I'm afraid there's not very much to be done in Cambridge," said Sheepshanks. "It's no longer a university, but a military camp."

"But at any rate," said Baltazar, "I can find here a few human beings I know who might put me in the way of actual things—help me on my course."

"That's quite possible," said Sheepshanks.

"I also have to see what can be done for Quong Ho. I want him to come up next term. Has the college ever had an undergraduate who has come up with a knowledge of Elliptic Functions?"

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Sheepshanks, in interested astonishment.

"He's a wonder," laughed Baltazar. "I ought to know, because I've taught him daily for ten years. Well, he'll be on your list, if you'll have him. He's a dear creature. Manners like a hidalgo. Mind cultivated in the best of Chinese and English literature. And speaks English like his favourite author, Dr. Johnson."

Sheepshanks smiled, a very pleasant smile, in which every wrinkle of his dry brown face seemed to have a part.

"How you keep your enthusiasms, Baltazar!"

"Quong Ho is worth them. You'll see. As soon as he's fit for it, I'll send him to you. You set him last June's Tripos Papers—Part II, if you like. I'll bet you anything he'll floor them. Of course I'm enthusiastic," he said, after relighting his pipe, which had gone out. "I've no kith or kin in the world. I've adopted Quong Ho as my intellectual son and heir."

Sheepshanks rose, walked to the open window deliberately and looked out. Presently he turned.

"It seems strange," said he, "that you should adopt a Chinaman, when your English son is giving great promise of following in your footsteps."

Baltazar regarded him in a puzzled way. Then he laughed.

"My stepson. I'm afraid, my dear Sheepshanks, when I left the mother I left her son. One of the defects of my qualities is honesty. I may be brutal, but I can't take a sentimental interest in the son of old Doon."

"The man I'm talking about," said Sheepshanks, in the precise, clipped, nasal manner under which Baltazar remembered many a delinquent and uppish pupil to have wilted in the old days, "isn't called Doon. His name is Baltazar. He came up with a Minor Scholarship over the way"—he waved a hand, indicating the grey wing of the neighbouring college visible through the window—"and he was the most promising freshman of his year."

Baltazar rose too.

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about. I don't suppose I'm the only Baltazar left in England. He can be no son of mine. It's idiotic. You ought to know."

"I do know," said Sheepshanks.

Baltazar's eyes flashed in amazement and he made a stride towards him. "What do you know? What are you suggesting?"

"A child was born here in Cambridge, three months after you left us."

Something almost physical seemed to hit Baltazar between the eyes, partially stunning him. He felt his way to the nearest chair and sat down.

"My God!" said he. "Oh, my God!"

He remained for some time, his head on his hands, overwhelmed by the significance of the revelation. At last he sprang suddenly to his feet.

"No wonder you haven't forgiven me," he cried, with characteristic directness. "To run away from a woman in such circumstances would be the unforgivable sin. But I swear to God I never knew. She gave no hint, and I saw her only a few days before I left. Such a possibility never entered my mind. Has never entered it. I may be any kind of a sinner, but not such a scoundrel as that. I left her because we were miserable together.—I did my best—now and then a brief reconciliation.—I suppose she tried too, in her way.—After the last, things were worse than ever. And then there was the life of some one else I couldn't sacrifice—a flower of a thing. I felt my wife would be glad to see the last of me. So I fled like Christian from the Burning City. If I had known that—well, that I was leaving this responsibility behind me, I should have faced things out. My God! man, you must believe me," he ended passionately.

Sheepshanks through his thick gold spectacles met Baltazar's fierce gaze for a few moments. Then he held out his hand:

"I believe you, J. B., and doing so takes a great load off my mind."

"I've noticed your avoidance of the old name," said Baltazar. "It must have been in pretty evil odour for the past twenty years or so."

"You're such an incalculable fellow," said Sheepshanks, with a kind smile. "The romance you so delicately suggest never occurred to any of us."

"Well, well," said Baltazar, "all that is done and over long ago. Anyhow, I wasn't the heartless wretch

Cambridge must have taken me for. I leave my rehabilitation in your hands. To me now the main, staring, extraordinary fact is that I have a son. A son. I, who thought I was wandering lonely as What's-his-name's cloud. I've got a son. A mathematician. The same lunatic quirk of brain. If he were the village idiot—it would be different.—You remember the ghastly story of Guy de Maupassant? But not only my own flesh and blood, but my own flesh, blood and intellect." He paced about the room. "What kind of a fellow is he? Is he like me? Have you seen him?"

"Yes; once. Crosby—you remember Crosby?" He waved a hand towards the college visible through the window.

"Yes, yes," said Baltazar impatiently.

"Crosby asked me to breakfast, one day, to meet him. The son of John Baltazar, senior mathematical scholar of his year, was a curiosity. We didn't tell the young man so. Indeed, I suppose he wondered why such an old fossil like myself was there."

"Never mind what he thought of old fossils, my dear Sheepshanks. What was he like?"

"Like you. Quite recognizable. But fairer, and though sensible and manly, less—if you will allow me to say so—less of a firebrand."

"Anyhow, a good straight chap. Not merely low mathematical cunning enveloped in any kind of smug exterior?"

"He's a son any father would be proud of," said Sheepshanks.

"And where is he now?"

Sheepshanks made a vague gesture. "Where is all the gallant youth of England? Over there, fighting."

"Are you sure?"

"It would be small compliment to you, J. B., if I wasn't sure," replied Sheepshanks with a smile. "The only undergraduates left in the University are a few unhappy youngsters rejected from the army for physical reasons. The maimed, halt and blind; also medical students hurrying through their course, and the usual contingent of Indian students who, not belonging to the fighting races of India, can find no place in the armies of Great Britain."

"I don't care about paralytics or doctors or Indians," said Baltazar. "I want to know about this son of mine."

"Crosby would tell you. He's up. I saw him yesterday. Of course, you know he's Master now."

"Crosby?" cried Baltazar incredulously. "Crosby—that pragmatical owl, Master of——?"

"Even as you are master of intolerance," Sheepshanks interrupted. "Crosby has developed into a very great man, and there's not a head of house in the University who is more beloved by his college. You'll find him in intimate touch with half a dozen generations of undergraduates."

"I'm learning things every minute," said Baltazar. "So much for Crosby. I'll go along and see him. But the boy—I suppose he has got a Christian name. What is it?"

"I forget—but I can easily find out." Sheepshanks took *The Cambridge University Calendar* from a shelf. "But perhaps you'd like to look through it yourself."

Baltazar turned rapidly over the pages, found the college he sought and the name of Godfrey Baltazar in its list of scholars.

"Godfrey!" he exclaimed. "That was my father's name." Then after a pause, as though speak-

ing to himself: "It was good of her. Very good of her."

He walked to the casement window which Sheepshanks had vacated and leaned his elbows on the sill, looking out for a long time into a blur of things. Sheepshanks glanced at his broad shoulders which seemed bowed beneath an intolerable burden, and after a moment or two of hesitation slipped noiselessly from the room. Presently Baltazar turned, started to find himself alone, frowned, then recognizing a delicate instinct on the part of his host, went back to the window and his whirl of thoughts and emotions.

What a mess he had made of his life! What folly had been each one of those flaming decisions that had marked his career! Was he a coward? The word stung. There was a difference between flying from temptation and resisting it. He remembered the comparison he had just made between himself and Christian flying from the Burning City, and suddenly saw the meanness and selfishness of Bunyan's Hero—egotism as colossal as that of St. Simeon Stylites on whom he had once airily lectured to Quong Ho. What mattered anything human, wife, children born and the child within the womb, so long as he saved his own wretchedly unimportant soul? For aught Christian cared, all his family and his friends could go literally to Hell, so long as he himself escaped. A sorry figure. And just such a sorry figure had cut John Baltazar. And, life being real and implacable, he had not even succeeded in saving his paltry soul. He had lost it at every step. His fine phrases to Quong Ho; his boast of altruistic service to mankind? Sheer juggling with sacred things. Sheer egotism. Sheer vanity.

What a mess he had made of his life! What folly had been his cowardly flight! If he had known, he

would have remained. Yes. A salve to conscience. But the consciences of brave men need no salve.

He had fooled away his life in a country that had no need of him, from which he had derived no measure of spiritual profit. Strip the glamour of sheer scholarship from his interest in Chinese philosophy, and what remained? Scarcely anything that the heir of Western thought had not picked up in his child's copy-book. And whilst he was wasting his brain and his moral energies and his physical strength in pursuit of the shadows, the son of his loins, a human thing for whose moulding and development he was, by the laws of nature and civilization, responsible, had grown up, haphazard, fatherless, motherless, under alien guidance. He threw his memory back to his wife's family, the Woodcotts, narrow-minded, bigoted, vulgar—Lord! how he had detested them. Had he abandoned his son to their untender mercies? No matter who had trained the boy, he himself had failed in the most elementary duty of mankind.

Suddenly he raised both clenched fists and cried aloud:

"By God! I swear——"

Then suddenly he saw the ironical face of the village doctor of Water-End and heard his sarcastic words: "A bad habit. I should give it up"—and his arms dropped helpless by his sides. No. What was this oath but one more irretrievable plunge into the morass in which he floundered?

He began again to wonder concerning this newly discovered son, strove to visualize him. A broad, upstanding fellow, like himself. Fairer—he got that from his mother. A fine, soldierly figure in khaki. But only a boy—just twenty. And he had thrown everything to the winds on the outbreak of war and had

been fighting in France—that child—for two years. He drew a sharp breath, as a sudden thought smote him. The boy might have been killed. Apparently he was still alive. Otherwise Sheepshanks would surely have heard. But supposing—supposing . . . He shivered at the thought of it.

Half an hour, an hour—he was unconscious of time—passed. Then the door opened and Sheepshanks appeared, followed by a short-bearded man in clerical tweeds.

"A bit of luck. I found Crosby in. I've told him everything, and he has been kind enough to come along."

Said Dr. Crosby a while later: "I have brought with me the boy's last letter—only a week old. Perhaps you would like to see it."

Baltazar stretched out an impatient hand. This thing so essentially personal, the first objective token of his son's existence, affected him deeply. The words swam before his eyes. He turned to the end to see the signature. His thumb against it, he held out the paper to Sheepshanks, and said in a shaking voice:

"That's my handwriting. He has the same trick of the 'B' and the 'z.'"

The letter informed the Master that he was still at Churton Towers, near Godalming; that the stump obstinately refused to heal completely, owing perhaps to the original gangrene; that he hoped they would not chuck him out of the Army, because, with a brand-new foot, he could be useful in hundreds of ways; but that, if they did, he would come up and continue to read for his degree.

"May I keep this, Crosby?" asked Baltazar; and, permission given, he folded it up and put it in his pocket. Then he turned to Sheepshanks. "Why didn't you tell me at first what had happened?"

" My dear fellow," said Sheepshanks, " I only heard he had been wounded. I was unaware of details. That's why I went at once to Crosby. In these days one must be discreet."

" Yes, no doubt," said Baltazar absently. He paced the room for a few moments. Then halting : " I must see this son of mine. But I must see him in my own way. Will you do me the favour not to let him know of my reappearance until I send you word ? "

" Certainly," said Dr. Crosby.

" Thanks," said he.

He walked to and fro, his head full of the tragedy of this maimed young life. He looked from one unemotional face to the other. Their attitude was incomprehensible. Crosby, before showing him the letter, had spoken of wound and amputation in the most matter-of-fact, unfeeling way. Suddenly he burst out indignantly :

" I wonder if you two people have any idea of what I'm feeling. To-day I learnt the wonderful news that I've got a son—a splendid fellow, a man and a scholar. An hour afterwards you tell me that he's a one-legged cripple. Neither of you seem to care a hang. I haven't heard a word of sympathy or pity——"

The white-headed, gold-spectacled senior tutor rushed towards him, in some agitation, with outspread hands.

" My dear J. B., we must observe a sense of proportion. You really ought to go on your knees and thank God that your son is preserved to you. He's out of that hell for ever."

" My boy—my only son—was killed last December," said Dr. Crosby.

Baltazar stared for a moment at the short-bearded man and sought for words, even the most conventional

words ; but they would not come. Then, memory flashing on him, he stretched out his open hand about three feet from the ground, and said, in a voice which sounded queer in his own ears :

"That little chap ? "

"Yes. That little chap," said Dr. Crosby.

CHAPTER XII

A DAY or two afterwards Godfrey Baltazar, still tied by his maimed leg to Churton Towers, received a letter which caused him to frown and rub his head. It was typewritten save for the signature, and was addressed, care of a firm of solicitors in Bedford Row. As soon as Marcelle came to do his morning dressing he handed it to her.

"What do you make of this?"

Before replying, she read it through without remark. It ran:

"DEAR SIR,

"I have just been visiting Cambridge after many years' absence abroad, and have learned that the son of my old college friend, John Baltazar, is lying wounded at Churton Towers Convalescent Home. I am writing to you, therefore, to inquire whether one who was very intimately connected with your father in the old days might venture to run down to Godalming and see you, with the double purpose of making the acquaintance of John Baltazar's son, of whose brilliant academic beginnings the University authorities have informed me, and of paying a stranger Englishman's tribute to a gallant fellow who has shed his blood for his country. My time being at your disposal, I shall be happy to keep any appointment you may care to make.

"Yours very faithfully,

"JAMES BURDEN."

"Seems rather nice of him," said Marcelle.

"I suppose it is. But who is the old fossil?"

Marcelle smiled. "Probably what he claims to be. An old college friend of your father."

"He must have been a don of sorts. Not merely an undergraduate friend. Otherwise how could he have got straight to the people who knew all about me? You ever heard of James Burden?"

"No," replied Marcelle, shaking her head. "How could I know all the fellows of your father's college? Newnham students in my day were kept far from the madding crowd of dons."

"Well, what about seeing the sentimental blighter? Oh, of course he's sentimental. His 'double purpose' reeks of it. Rather what before the war we used to call 'colonial.' What shall I do? Shall I tell him to come along?"

"Why not? It can do no harm."

Godfrey reflected for a few moments. Then he said:

"You see, before I met you I would have jumped at the idea of seeing an old friend of my father. But you knew more of him than the whole lot of the others put together. I've got my intimate picture of him through you. I'm not so keen to get sidelights, possibly distorting lights, from anybody else. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"I see," said Marcelle. "Let us have a look at the foot."

She plied her nurse's craft; set him up for the day's mild activities. When he hobbled an hour later into the hall to attend to his correspondence and resume his study of the late Dr. Routh's *Treatise on Rigid Dynamics*, he wrote a polite note to Mr. Burden suggesting an appointment. After all, even in such

luxurious quarters as Churton Towers, life was a bit monotonous, and stragglers from the outer world not unwelcome. It was all very well for most of his comrades, who had mothers, fathers, sisters, cousins, girl friends attached and unattached to visit them ; but he, Godfrey, had found himself singularly alone. Here and there a representative of the Woodcott crowd had paid him a perfunctory visit. He professed courteous appreciation. But they were not his people. Memories of his pariah boyhood discounted their gush over the one-footed hero with the Military Cross. He was cynical enough to recognize that they took a vast lot of the credit to themselves, to the Family. They went away puffed with pride and promises. He said to Marcelle :

" I'm not taking any."

A few men friends, chiefly men on leave, wandered down from time to time. But they had the same old tales to tell ; of conditions in the sector, of changes in the battalion, of such and such a scrap, of promotions and deaths, a depressing devil of a lot of deaths ; the battalion wasn't what it was when Godfrey left it ; he could not imagine the weird creatures in Sam Browne belts that blew in from nowhere, to take command of platoons, things with their mother's milk wet on their lips, and garters from the Burlington Arcade, their idea of devilry, in their pockets. And the N.C.O.'s ! My God ! Oh, for the good old days of—six months ago !

Godfrey, wise in his generation, laughed at the jeremiads of these callow *laudatores temporis acti*, and on probing further, satisfied himself that everything was still for the best in the best of all possible armies. He also found that ginger was still hot in the mouths of these friends of his, and that he had not lived until

he had seen Betty or Kitty or Elsie So-and-So, or such and such a Revue.

Frankly and boyishly he appreciated his friends' entertaining chatter. But they came and went, with the superficial *bonhomie* of the modern soldier. They touched no depths. If he had died of his gangrened foot, they would have said "Poor old chap!" and thought no more about him. He did not condemn them, for he himself had said and thought the same of many a comrade who had gone West. It was part of the game which he played as scrupulously and as callously as the others. He craved, however, solicitude deeper and more permanent.

Of course there was Dorothy Mackworth. She did not come to Churton Towers; but she had dutifully attended the Carlton when he had summoned her thither to meet Sister Baring, and put on for his benefit her most adorable clothing and behaviour. The lunch had been a meal of delight. The young man glowed over his guests—the two prettiest women, so he declared, in the room. Marcelle in the much-admired hat, her cheeks slightly flushed and her eyes bright, looked absurdly young. The girl, conscious of angelic dealing, carried off her own absurd youth with a conquering air that bewitched him more than ever. She dropped golden words:

"Oh, let us cut out Leopold! I've no use for him."

She had no use for Leopold Doon, his half-brother and rival. He was to be cut out of their happy thoughts.

Also:

"I'm not going to have you creep back into civil life and bury yourself at Cambridge. You'd get a hump there you'd never recover from. There's lots of jobs on the staff for a brainy fellow like him, aren't

there, Miss Baring? I'll press father's button and he'll do the rest."

Now Dorothy's father was a Major-General doing things at Whitehall, whose nature was indicated by mystic capital letters after his name.

"You'll look splendid in red tabs," she added.

This profession of interest and this air of proprietorship enraptured him. Under the ban of her displeasure Cambridge faded into a dreary, tumbledown desolation. She had but to touch him with her fairy wand and he would break out all over in red tabs. She spoke with assurance in the future tense.

And again, in a low voice, on their winding way out through the tables of the restaurant, Marcelle preceding them by a yard or two:

"Miss Baring's a real dear. But don't fall in love with her, for I swear I'm not going to play gooseberry."

He had protested in a whisper: "Fall in love with anyone but you?"

And she had replied: "I think I'm nice enough," and had laughed at him over her shoulder and looked exceedingly desirable.

He had never dared till that inspired moment speak to her of love in plain, bald terms; now he had done it and not only remained unfrozen, but basked in the warmth of her approval.

"I think that's the most beautiful beano I've ever had," he said to Marcelle, on their journey back to Godalming.

Yes. There was Dorothy. She had promised to participate in a similar beano any time he liked. But such bright occurrences must be rare. He longed to plunge into fervid correspondence. Caution restrained him. Elusive and perplexing, Heaven knew what she

might say to a violent declaration of passion. It might ruin a state of things both delicate and delicious. Far better carry on his wooing by word of mouth.

In the meanwhile, the days at Churton Towers were long and life lacked variety. So he looked forward to the visit of Mr. James Burden, compound of fossil and sentimental blighter though he might be.

Punctually at three o'clock, the appointed hour, one afternoon, the maid who attended the door came up to Godfrey Baltazar waiting lonely in the great hall, and announced the visitor. With the aid of the now familiar crutch he rose nimbly. He saw advancing towards him in a brisk, brusque way, a still young-looking man in grey tweeds, rather above medium height, thick-set, giving an immediate impression of physical strength.

"Are you Mr. Godfrey Baltazar?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy courteously.

"My name is Burden. It's good of you to let me come to see you."

He grasped Godfrey's hand in a close grip and looked at him keenly out of bright grey eyes. Not much fossil there, thought the young man. On the contrary, a singularly live personality. There was strength in the heavy though clean-cut face, marked by the deep vertical furrow between the brows; strength in the coarse, though well-trimmed, thatch of brown hair unstreaked by grey; strength in his voice.

"Do sit down," said Godfrey.

Baltazar sat down and, looking at his son, clutched the arm of his chair. Crosby and Sheepshanks were right. A splendid fellow, the ideal of a soldier, clean-run, clear-eyed; a touch of distinction and breed

about him, manifestation of the indomitable old Huguenot strain. By God ! A boy to be proud of ; and he saw bits of himself in the boy's features, expression and gesture. A thrill ran through him as he drank in the new joy of parenthood. Yet through the joy pain stabbed him—fierce resentment against Fate, which had cheated him of the wonderful years of the boy's growth and development. For the first time in his decisive life he felt tongue-tied and embarrassed. He cursed the craftiness that brought him hither under an assumed name. Yet, had he written as John Baltazar, he would have risked a rebuff. What sentimental regard or respect could this young man have for his unknown and unnatural father ? At any rate, his primary object had been attained. Here he was in his son's presence, a courteously welcomed guest. He looked at him with yearning eyes ; Godfrey met his gaze with cool politeness. Baltazar wiped a perspiring brow. After a few moments Godfrey broke an awkward situation by offering his cigarette case. The cigarettes lit, Baltazar said suddenly :

" It's an infernal shame ! "

" What ? " asked Godfrey, startled.

Baltazar pointed downwards. " That," said he.

" Oh ! " Godfrey laughed. " I'm one of the lucky ones. Far better to have stopped it with my foot than my head."

" But to limp about on crutches all your life—a fellow like you—in the pride of youth and strength. It makes one angry."

" That's kind of you, sir," said Godfrey. " But it doesn't worry me much. They're wangling a new foot for me, and as soon as I can stick it on, I'll throw away my crutches, and no one but myself will be a bit the wiser."

"You take it bravely," said Baltazar.

"It's all in the day's work. What's the good of grousing? What's the point of a real foot, anyway, when a faked one will do as well?"

But though Baltazar admired the young fellow's careless courage, he still glowered at the maimed leg. He resented fiercely the lost foot. He had been robbed of a bit of this wonderful son.

"How did you come to get hit?" he asked abruptly.

There are many ways of asking a wounded man such a question. Many he loathes. Hence the savagely facetious answers that have been put on record. But there are ways that compel reply. Baltazar's was one. Godfrey felt strangely affected by the elder man's earnestness; yet his instinct forbade him to yield at once.

"Getting hit's as simple as being bowled out at cricket. A jolly sight simpler. Like going out of the rain and getting wet. You just go out without an umbrella and something hits you, and that's the end of it."

"But when was it? How was it?" asked Baltazar.

Godfrey, after the way of British subalterns, gave a bald account of his personal adventures in his last fight near Ypres. It might have been a description of a football match. Baltazar wondered. For all his wanderings and experience of life he had never heard a first-hand account of modern warfare. The psychology of it perplexed and fascinated him. He plied the young man with questions; shrewd, direct questions piercing to the heart of things; and gradually Godfrey's English reserve melted, and he laid aside his defensive armour and told his intent visitor what he wanted to know. And Baltazar's swift brain seized the vivid pictures and co-ordinated them until

he grew aware of the hells through which this young and debonair gentleman had passed.

"And what did you get that for?"

He pointed to the ribbon of the Military Cross.

"I managed to get away with some machine guns out of a tight corner. It was only when we were scooting back that I discovered we had been left in the air. I thought the battalion was quite up close. If I hadn't, I should probably have bolted. These things are all flukes."

"What a proud man your father would have been," said Baltazar.

"By the way, yes," said Godfrey. "I was forgetting. You were a friend of my father's."

"It's a great misfortune that he never met you," said Baltazar.

"He disappeared before I was born," Godfrey remarked dryly.

"I know. That's why I wrote to you in some diffidence. I had no idea how you regarded your father's memory. I hope you appreciate my feeling that I might be treading on delicate ground."

Godfrey waved an indulgent hand. "Oh, that's all right, sir. My father was a distinguished and romantic person, and I'm rather interested in him than otherwise."

Baltazar drew a great breath of relief. At any rate, he was not execrated by the paragon of sons.

"I see," said he, his features relaxing, for the first time, into a smile. "Like any other ancestor, he's part of your family history."

"Something of the sort. Only perhaps a bit nearer."

"How nearer?"

"People live who knew him in the flesh. You, for instance."

"Yes," said Baltazar. "I knew him intimately. We were undergraduates and dons together. I left Cambridge about the same time as he did—when my fellowship lapsed. I went away to the Far East, where I've spent my life. I'm just back, you know. Instinct took me to Cambridge, a sort of Rip van Winkle, to see if there were any remains of old friends —and my visit to you is the result of my inquiries."

"When you wrote to me, I wondered whether you could tell me if my father was alive or dead."

Baltazar made a little gesture.

"*Quien sabe?* From what I remember of John Baltazar, he was not a man to let himself die easily. He was the most obstinate mule I ever came across. Death would have had a trying time with him. Besides, he was as tough as a rhinoceros."

"So he still may be in the land of the living?"

"As far as I know." Baltazar leaned forward on his chair. "You have no feeling of resentment against him?"

"One can't feel resentment against a shadow," replied Godfrey.

"Suppose he reappeared, what would be your attitude towards him?"

Godfrey frowned at the touch of impertinence in the question which probed too deeply. He glanced distrustfully at his visitor.

"I'm afraid I've never considered the point," he replied frostily. "Have you any special reason for putting it to me?"

Baltazar winced. "Only as a student of psychology. But I see you would rather continue to regard him as a legendary character?"

"Quite," said Godfrey.

"You must forgive me, Mr. Baltazar," said the

father, with a smile. "I'm half Orientalized and only beginning to attune myself to Western habits of thought. I lived for so many years in the interior of China that I almost lost the Western point of view. Well, there the basis of all religious and philosophic systems is filial piety. The whole moral and political system of the Empire has been reared on it for thousands of years. If you were a Chinaman, you would venerate your father, no matter what grievances you might have against him or how shadowy and legendary he might be."

"But I'm not a Chinaman," said Godfrey.

"Precisely. That's where your typically Western point of view is of great interest to me. I hope, therefore, you see that the question I put to you, although it may be one of curiosity, is of philosophical and not idle curiosity."

"I see," replied Godfrey, smiling and mollified. "May I ask you which of the two attitudes you consider the most workable in practical life?"

"I told you just now," said Baltazar, "that my mind was in process of adjustment."

There came a slight pause. Godfrey broke it by suggesting politely that Mr. Burden must have found Cambridge greatly changed. Baltazar launched into vivid description of the toga giving way to arms. Eventually came to personalities. The death of Dr. Crosby's only son.

"Yes. I heard," said Godfrey. "Fine soldier. Done in by high explosive shell. Not a trace of him or six others left. Not even the heel of a boot."

"How lightly you all take death nowadays," Baltazar remarked wonderingly.

"That oughtn't to surprise you," said Godfrey.

"I've been led to believe they don't worry their heads much about it in China."

"I thought it one of the points at which East and West could never touch." He laughed. "More readjustment, you see."

"In the Army we've got either to be fatalists or lunatics. If your number's up it's up, and that's all there is to it. *You* can't do anything. You can't even run away."

"But surely you cling to life—young men like you—with all sorts of golden promises in front of you?"

"We don't do silly ass things," said Godfrey. "We don't stand about like Ajaxes defying the lightning. When shells come we scurry like rabbits into the nearest funk-hole. We're not a bit brave unless there's no help for it. But when you see so many people killed around you, you say 'My turn next,' and it doesn't seem to matter. You think 'Who the blazes are you that you should be so precious?' . . . No. Going out all in the fraction of a second like Crosby doesn't matter. Why should it? What does give you a horrible feeling in the pit of your stomach is the fear lest you may be utterly messed up and go on living. But death itself is too damned ordinary. At any rate, that's the way I size it up. Of course it's pretty cheap and easy for a lucky beggar like me, who's out of it for ever, to talk hot philosophic air—but all the same, looking back, I think I've told you in a vague sort of way what I felt when I was out in France. Sometimes the whole thing seems a nightmare. At others, I want to kick myself for sitting here in luxury when there's so much to be done out there. I had got my platoon—I was acting first lieutenant—like a high-class orchestra—just the last two months, you

know. It was the weirdest feeling. I just had to wave my baton and they did everything I wanted. Once or twice I nearly cried with sheer amazement. And then just when the band was playing its damnedest, I got knocked out and fainted like a silly fool, and woke up miles away. When one has sweated one's guts out over a thing, it's annoying not to reap the fruit of it. It's rough luck. It's—well——"

Suddenly self-consciousness returned. He flushed deeply.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir. I never meant to bore you like this about myself."

"Bore me!" cried Baltazar. "My dear fellow, you could go on like this for ever and command my most amazed interest. Do go on."

"It's very kind of you," stammered the young man, "but—really——"

He stopped, confused, embarrassed, ashamed of his boasting. Never had he spoken like that to human being of his incomparable platoon. Never had he unveiled to profane eyes his soldier's Holy of Holies. Certainly not to his comrades. Not to Dorothy. Not even to Marcelle. What on earth must this stranger, whom he didn't know from Adam, be thinking of him? He lit a cigarette, before, remembering manners, he offered his case to his visitor. The sense of sentimental braggadocio overwhelmed him, burning him red-hot. He longed with sudden fury to get rid of this uncanny guest with his clear, compelling eyes, which even now steadily regarded him with an inscrutable smile and continued the impossible invitation: "Do go on." He could no more go on than smite him over the head with his crutch (which he was far more inclined to do) for plucking out the heart of his mystery. If only the man would go! But he

sat there, strong, urbane, maddeningly kind. He hated him. Yet he felt himself under his influence. From the man seemed to emanate a suggestion of friendship, interest, control, which his sensitive English spirit vehemently repudiated. He heard him say :

" The old French blood in your veins has suddenly come up against the English."

He started. " What do you know about my French ancestry ? "

" Your father was very proud of his Huguenot descent."

" My father ! " cried Godfrey, his nerves on edge. " I'm rather fed up with my father. I wish he had never been born."

Baltazar rose. " I'm sorry," said he courteously, " to have distressed you. Believe me, it was far from my intention."

Godfrey stared at him for a second, and passed his hand across his eyes.

" It's for me to apologize. I'm afraid I've been rude. Please don't go."

But Baltazar stood smiling, holding out his hand. Now that the man was going, Godfrey realized the enormity of his own discourtesy. He looked around as if seeking some outlet for the situation. And then, as if in answer to a prayer, at the end of the hall appeared the passing, grey-clad figure of a guardian angel.

" Sister ! " he cried.

Marcelle halted, smiled, and advanced towards him.

" Sister," said he, " this is Mr. James Burden. You ought to know each other. You both knew my father."

Baltazar turned. And for a few speechless seconds he and Marcelle stared into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

GODFREY half rose from his chair, more than puzzled by the mutual recognition.

"You said you didn't know Mr. Burden," he cried.

But neither heeded him. Baltazar made a stride forward and with one hand gripped Marcelle by the arm and with the other motioned in his imperious way to the open door. Still looking at him in wonderment, she allowed him to lead her quickly to the terrace at the head of the steps. Godfrey's astonished gaze followed them till they disappeared. Outside, Baltazar released her.

"Marcelle! What in thunder are you doing here?"

She was too greatly overwhelmed to reply. She could only gasp a few broken and foolish words.

"You? John Baltazar? Alive?"

"Never been less dead. But you! You of all people. My God! although I lost you, I could never lose your face. It has been with me all the time. And there it is, the same as ever. But what are you doing here?"

She made a vague gesture over her costume.

"I'm a professional nurse. Sister-in-charge. I've been nursing all my life."

"Not when I knew you," said Baltazar.

"My life began after that."

"Married?"

The colour came back into her white cheeks. "No," she said.

"Neither am I."

He put both hands on her shrinking shoulders and bent on her eyes which she could not meet.

"You at last, after all these years! Just the same. Just as beautiful. Much more."

"This is rather public," she managed to say, releasing herself. "There are lots of patients——"

He laughed and, indicating the parapet, invited her to sit.

"You must forgive me," he said, seating himself by her side. "The sight of you blotted out the world. Don't be frightened. I'm quite tame now. Look at me."

She obeyed him as she had done in her early girlhood, dominated for the moment by his tone.

"How do you think I'm looking? Battered by time? A crock to be wrapped up in flannel and set in the chimney-corner to wheeze the rest of his life away?"

"You look very little older," she said with a wan smile. "And you haven't a grey hair in your head."

"That's good. I'm as young as ever I was. I can sweep away twenty years and begin where I left off."

"You're more fortunate than I am," said Marcelle.

"Rubbish!" said Baltazar.

She glanced at him wistfully and then out over the trees.

"Nursing isn't the road to perpetual youth," she said. Then lest he should catch up her words, she continued swiftly: "But you must tell me where you have been, how you've come back to life. You disappeared utterly. You never wrote. If we all

thought you dead, was it our fault? When Godfrey showed me your letter, I never dreamed who James Burden might be."

"Godfrey?" Baltazar pounced on the name. "Do you call him Godfrey? Then you must be old friends. Hence the miracle of finding you together. Have you been mothering him all his life?"

She shook her head. "How you jump at conclusions! No. I met him for the first time when I came here—a month ago."

"So it's just Chance, Fate, Destiny, the three of us meeting like this? The hand of God? . . . Wait, though. I can't see quite clearly. You learned he was my son?"

She smiled again:

"Do you think we call all young officers here by their Christian names?"

"Does he know that you knew me?"

"If he didn't," she replied, "he wouldn't have consulted me about Mr. Burden's letter. I wish I had been mothering him all his life," she added after a pause; "but I've been doing my best for the last month. I can't help loving him."

"What does he know about you and me?"

"I've told him everything," said Marcelle.

Baltazar started to his feet.

"Then when he saw us gaping at each other just now, he must have guessed, or he can't have any Baltazar brains in his head." He moved away a pace; then turned on her. "You gave me a good character?"

Her head was bowed. She did not see the rare laughter in his eyes, but took his question seriously.

"Can you doubt it?" She beckoned him nearer, and said in a low voice: "I may have been wrong,

but I have given him to understand that it was entirely on my account—you know what I mean——"

"What other reason, in the name of God, could I have had?" he exclaimed with a large gesture.

If there had lingered a doubt in her mind, the note of sincerity in the man's cry would have driven it away for ever. It awoke a harmonic chord of gladness in her heart and her whole being vibrated. Although John Baltazar's subsequent career was as yet dark and mysterious, her faith, at least, was justified. She said without looking at him:

"You'll find that I've been loyal."

He strode towards her and, disregarding the perils of publicity, again took her by the shoulders.

"What kind of a cynical beast do you think I've turned into?"

He swept away, leaving her physically conscious of the impress of his fingers in her flesh and her brain reeling.

Baltazar marched into the great hall to Godfrey, still sitting in his arm-chair, his maimed leg, as usual, supported on the outstretched crutch.

"No, don't get up."

He swung the chair which he had previously occupied close to Godfrey's and sat down.

"By this time you must have guessed who I am," he said in his direct fashion.

"I suppose you're my father," said the young man.

"I am," replied Baltazar. "My extraordinary meeting with Miss Baring gave me away. Didn't it?"

"I suppose it did. Perhaps I ought to have suspected something when you mentioned China. But I didn't."

"The assumed name was the one I was known by for eighteen years—ever since I left England. I thought I'd take it up again for the sake of a reconnaissance, like the rich old uncle in the play, to see what kind of a man you were and how you looked upon your unknown father. Hence the questions you may have thought impertinent."

"I quite see," said Godfrey, pulling at his short-cropped moustache.

Baltazar threw himself back in his chair. "Well, there it is. We're father and son. Miss Baring has told you, from her point of view, why I threw over everything and disappeared. Her conjecture is absolutely correct. I must, however, say one thing to you, once and for all. I hadn't the remotest idea that you were coming into the world. If I had, I should have remained and done my duty. I only heard of your existence a week ago—at Cambridge."

"Yes?" said Godfrey.

"Let us come straight to the point then. You either believe me or disbelieve me. If you don't believe me, nothing I can ever say or do will make you. If you do believe me, we can go ahead. It's the vital point in our future relations. Speak out straight. Which is it?"

Godfrey looked for a few seconds into the luminous grey eyes—his own were somewhat hard—and then he said very deliberately:

"I certainly believe you. My conversations with Sister Baring made me take that particular point for granted."

Baltazar drew a long breath.

"That's all right, then. I think I also ought to assure you that beyond giving Cambridge a nine days' wonder, I have done nothing to discredit the name of

Baltazar. In China I had a position which no European to my knowledge has attained since Marco Polo. I left on account of the warring between two ideals—the Old China and the New. I belonged to the Old. I found I couldn't find orientation unless I came West for it. I returned to England two years ago."

"And you only went up to Cambridge last week?"

"Precisely. The intervening time I spent in a remarkable manner, which I'll tell you about on another occasion. In the meanwhile we're face to face with the overwhelming fact that I've discovered an unsuspected son, and you a legendary father. I'm fairly well off. So, I presume, are you. If you're not, my means are yours. It's well to clear the air, from the very beginning, of any possible sordid bogies."

"I never dreamed of such a thing," said Godfrey.

"All right. That's settled. We come now to the main point. We're father and son. What are we going to do about it?"

"It's a peculiar situation, sir," said Godfrey.

Baltazar, who, in the impatient interval between Sheepshanks's staggering news and the present interview, had pictured many a *dénouement* of the inevitable drama, had never pictured one so cold and unemotional as this. The Chinese filial ideal he knew to be nonexistent in the West; but in his uncompromising way he had imagined extremes. Either scornful enmity and repudiation, or a gush of human sentiment. A scene in a silly old French melodrama, a memory of boyhood, had haunted him. "*Mon fils!*"—"*Mon père!*" And the twain had thrown themselves into each other's arms. But neither of these dramatic situations had arisen. The situation, indeed, was characterized by the cool and thoughtful young man merely as "peculiar." Well, it was an intelligent

view. The boy had heard the arguments of the advocates of the devil and the advocate of the angels, and he had formed a sound and favourable judgment. On the angels' advocacy he had never reckoned. So much was there to the good. He was not condemned. On the other hand, he saw no signs of filial emotion. He himself, with his expansive temperament, would have rejoiced at being able to cry "*Mon fils!*" and clasp to his breast this son of his loins, this splendid continuance of his blood and his brain. But in the calm, collected young soldier he could discover no germ of reciprocated sentiment. He felt disappointed, almost rebuffed. All the pent-up emotion of the lonely man was ready to burst the lock-gates; it had to surge back on itself.

After a long silence, he said: "Yes, you're right. It is a peculiar situation. Perhaps circumstances make me take it more—what shall we say?—more emotionally than you. After all, I'm a perfect stranger. I've never done a hand's turn for you. I may be a complication in your life—to put it brutally—a damned nuisance. I don't want to be one, I assure you."

"Of course not," Godfrey answered with wrinkled forehead. "I quite understand. You must forgive me, sir, if I don't say much; but you'll agree that this revelation, or whatever we like to call it, is a bit sudden. If your mind, as you said just now, is in process of adjustment, what do you think mine must be?"

"All right," said Baltazar. "Let us leave it at that for the present."

He rose and marched to the door in search of Marcelle. But she had disappeared from the terrace and was nowhere visible to his eye scanning the garden. When he returned to the hall, Godfrey was standing.

"I suppose I must give the two of you time to recover from the shock of me. I can quite understand that bouncing in from the dead like this is disconcerting to one's friends." He looked at his watch. "I must be catching my train. I shall see you soon again, I hope."

"I was wondering, sir, whether you would lunch with me in town to-morrow," said Godfrey.

"Can you travel about like that?"

"Oh, Lord! yes. I'm going up to London in any case."

"Then we'll fix it. Only you'll lunch with me. It seems more fitting. When? Where? I have no club. My membership of the Athenæum lapsed twenty years ago. And, even if it hadn't, the Megatherium—Thackeray's name for it—is no good for hospitable purposes. Shall we say the Savoy at one-thirty?"

"That will suit me admirably," said the young man.

"Good-bye."

They shook hands. Godfrey accompanied him to the terrace.

"Have you a taxi or cab waiting?"

"I came on the feet which I unworthily possess," replied Baltazar with a smile. "Tell Sister Baring I looked for her and she was gone."

"I'll send an orderly to find her, if you like."

Baltazar hesitated for a moment. A quick tenderness checked impetuous impulse.

"No, no!" he answered with a smile. "I've worried her sufficiently for to-day. She'll hear from me soon enough."

They shook hands again and he ran down the marble stairs, and, waving a farewell, strode away with the

elastic tread of youth. After a while Godfrey hobbled down, and, passing by the tennis courts and through the Japanese garden, arrived at the beech-wood, scene of their first and so many subsequent intimate talks, where he felt sure he should find Marcelle. He saw her, before she realized his approach, sitting on a bench, staring in front of her, her hands listless by her side. On the palm of one of them lay a crumpled ball of a handkerchief. She had been crying. As soon as she heard him she started and, looking round, greeted him with a smile.

"I knew I'd get you here," he said, sitting down by her side. "The long-lost parent has gone. He sent you a message."

He gave its substance. She nodded.

"He's quite right. I need a little time to get used to it."

Godfrey said: "Shall I clear out and leave you alone? Do tell me."

"No, no!" she said quickly. "I want you. I was just feeling dreadfully alone."

"Defenceless?"

"What makes you say that?" she asked, alarm in her eyes. For she had been frightened, absurdly frightened, by the swift sudden force that had impinged on her well-ordered way of life. It had set her wits wandering, her nerves jangling, her emotions dancing a grotesque and unintelligible saraband. Her shoulders still felt the clutch of irresistible fingers. She was sure they would bear black and blue marks for days. The virginal in her shrank from the possible contemplation of them in her mirror. Defenceless was the very word. What uncanny insight had suggested it to Godfrey?

In reply, he shrugged his shoulders. Then he said:

"That's how I feel, anyway. And if you want me, I want you. That's why I've ferreted you out. It strikes me we're more or less in the same boat. What are we going to do?"

"I don't know," she replied absently.

The beech foliage was just beginning to turn faint golden. Here and there a leaf fell. A brown squirrel scampering up a branch of a tree close in front of them, suddenly halted and watched them, as though wondering why the two humans sat so still and depressed on that mellow autumn afternoon. The sun was slanting warmly through the leaves. The beech-mast, young and tender, provided infinity of food beyond the dreams of gluttony. Never an enemy menaced the exquisite demesne. God was in His heaven, and all was right with the world. What in the name of Nature was there to worry these two humans? Well, it was no business of his, and he had enough business of his own to attend to. He glanced aside, and his quick eyes spotting a field-mouse at the base of a neighbouring tree, he darted off, a streak of brown lightning, in pursuit.

Presently Godfrey spoke, digging in front of him with his rubber-shod crutch.

"To be interested in a legendary sort of father is one thing. There's imagination and romance and atmosphere about it. But it's another thing to have this same father burst on one in flesh and blood—and such a lot of flesh and blood! Now a venerable, white-haired old sinner, with a pathetic, intellectual face, might appeal to one's sentiment. But this new father of mine doesn't. I may be unnatural, Marcelle, but he doesn't. Mind you, I've no grouch against him. Not a bit. I'm convinced he thought he was doing right to everybody. When he learned that I

existed, he was struck all of a heap. He lost no time in tracking me down. He's actuated by the best motives. . . . All the same, I can't rise to it. The more he tried to make an appeal, the more antagonistic I grew. It's beyond explanation."

"You'll learn to love him," said Marcelle loyally, yet without conviction. "He's a splendid man."

"He'll want to run me. Now I've run myself all my life. So I'll not stand for it. He'll want to run you too. You know it, Marcelle. That's why you've been sitting here feeling lonely and defenceless."

She laughed ruefully. "I suppose it is."

"The way he clawed hold of you and dragged you out——"

"That's the way he clawed hold of himself and dragged himself out, remember," replied Marcelle.

"A queer devil!" said Godfrey. "Do you know what he suggests to me? A disconnected dynamo." He laughed. "He ought to be hitched on to the war. He'd buck it up."

CHAPTER XIV

CAMBRIDGE put Baltazar on the track of old acquaintances, so that on his return to London he found himself in contact with people of his own standing who could explain to him the contemporary attitude of mind. There was Burtingshaw, K.C., for instance, a member of the Inventions Committee, and Weatherley, a professor of Modern History, whom the war had developed into an indefatigable publicist, and Jackman, a curious blend of classical scholar and man of business, who had allowed his family mustard-making firm to look after itself while he spent laborious days at the Admiralty in uncomfortable naval uniform. All welcomed the elderly prodigal, though in return for fatted calves—these were happy days before rationing—they demanded an account of his adventures. A man can't make a sensational disappearance from a small social unit and turn up twenty years afterwards without encountering natural human curiosity. This, over and over again, he had to satisfy, until he began to regard his absurd history with loathing, especially that of the past two years. He went through it, however, grimly, as part of the penalty he must pay for folly. After his first meeting with them at offices and clubs, he received invitations to dinner at their respective homes.

The night before he went to Godalming he dined with the Jackmans. The family consisted of Mrs.

Jackman, a homely woman, who spent most of her time at a Y.M.C.A. canteen on the south side of the river, two young girls and a boy home on leave from France. A few guests had been invited to meet John Baltazar ; a colonel of artillery on sick leave, a notoriously question-asking Conservative Member of Parliament, a judge, the wives of the two last, and a woman just back from eighteen months' Red Cross work on the Russian front. A typical war gathering.

As soon as chance enabled him to speak to his host after his entrance into this galaxy of civilization, he said :

" Man alive ! you shouldn't have asked all these people. I've not been in a European drawing-room for twenty years. My instinct is to wander about, growling, like a bear."

Jackman, a florid, good-natured, clean-shaven man, laughed.

" It's for your good. The sooner you get into the ways of the world the better."

" But what the devil shall I talk about ? "

" Let the other people talk. You listen. I thought that was what you wanted."

Baltazar sat between Mrs. Jackman and the lady from Russia. At first he felt somewhat embarrassed, even dazed. He had not conversed with intelligent women since his flight from England. Even in his brave University days, his scholarly habits had precluded him from mingling much in the general society of Cambridge. Now the broad feminine outlook somewhat mystified him. The vital question which once was referred to in bated breath as the Social Evil, cropped up, he knew not how. His two neighbours talked across him with a calm frankness that rendered him speechless. He looked around the table, apprehensive lest the two young girls might be over-

hearing the conversation. Their mother did not seem to care in the least. She quoted statistics in a loud, clear voice. The Red Cross lady sketched conditions in Russia. The question was suddenly put to him : What about China ? The fifty-year-old child of a forgotten day caught at the opening and talked hurriedly. He had lived in the heart of old China, mainly an agricultural population, a more or less moral, ancestor-fearing and tradition-bound welter of humanity. There was much to be said for old China, in spite of the absence of elementary ideas of sanitation and the ignorance of the new-fangled Western science of eugenics. Even now girl-children's feet were being bound. The ladies followed his desperate red herring and began a less alarming argument on infant welfare. When pressed for his opinion, he said :

" I don't think I've ever seen a baby at close quarters. I don't remember ever having touched one. I have it on hearsay that the proper thing to do is to prod a baby's cheek with the tip of your finger, which you wipe surreptitiously on your trousers. But I haven't done it. I know nothing at all about 'em. In fact, your proposition that babies are an important part of the body politic has never occurred to me. In prolific China babies spring up like weeds, unregarded. Some of them die, some of them live. And the living are for the most part weeds, too. One gets used there to an almost animal conception of the phenomena of life and death. I'm learning all sorts of things, getting all sorts of new points of view. Just see if I'm right. Modern Europe isn't China. Even before the war, the birth-rate was a matter of anxiety. Now Europe, depopulated of her male youth, is in a desperate quandary. Every baby is a priceless asset to the race. Lord ! " said he, pushing

spoon and fork abruptly together on his plate, "I never thought of it. I must appear to you like a fellow on a great Cunarder, proclaiming his discovery of America. But the discovery is there all the same. The idea never entered my head till this minute. Everybody's got to produce babies as fast as they can, and everybody's sacred duty is to see that they live and thrive and become potential parents of more healthy babies. That's the proposition, isn't it?"

Comfortable Mrs. Jackman smilingly agreed. Without doubt that was the proposition. The flower of the world cut off by the war. . . . Oh, it staggered imagination to speculate on the number of bright young lives sacrificed! There was So-and-So, and Somebody Else's son. Too tragic! The talk turned at once to the terrible intimacy of the war. Baltazar listened and learned many things.

When the men were left alone, Baltazar learned more things about the war; the blunders, the half-heartednesses, the mysterious influences that petrified action. The soldier spoke of the fierce fight of a devoted little set of enthusiasts for an adequate supply of machine guns; the judge, of hidden German ramifications against which he, as a mere administrator of written law, was powerless; the Conservative Member of Parliament—his revelations made every particular hair of Baltazar's brown thatch stand on end. Jackman talked of labour troubles, mentioned a recent case in which thousands of men making essential munitions of war had downed tools because a drunken pacifist workman had been dismissed from a factory. Baltazar, only a month awakened to the fact of war, held the same bewildered view of strikes as had nearly driven him forth at midnight from Pillivant's house. He burst out:

"Why don't they take the traitors and blow them from the cannon's mouth?"

The Member of Parliament laughed aloud:

"There's nothing like a fresh mind on things."

"Well, why don't they?"

"Don't you think," said the judge, "that such a course might tend to dishearten the working classes?"

"It wouldn't dishearten the Army," declared the literal-minded Colonel. "The men would be all for it. If any fellows tried to go on strike in the Army they'd be shot on sight."

He was the only one of the company who advocated violent measures. The others seemed to regard strikes as phenomena of nature impeding the war like artillery-arresting mud, or as inevitable accidents like explosions in powder factories. Baltazar went away full of undigested knowledge.

On his return from Godalming he dined with Weatherley, a bachelor, and a small gathering of fellow-publicists. Here the conversation ran on more intellectual lines. The war was considered from the international standpoint, discussions turned on the subject-races of Austria, the inner history of the Roumanian campaign, the sinister situation in Greece, the failure of Allied diplomacy all through Eastern Europe. Baltazar listened eagerly to the good keen talk, and went back to his hotel braced and exhilarated. Even if they had all been talking through their hats, it would not matter. Premises granted, the logic of it all had been faultless, an intellectual joy. And they had not been talking through their hats. They were men who knew, men who had access to vital information apparently despised by the Foreign Office.

He had fallen into a universe which seemed to be more and more inextricably jumbled as his outlook

widened. But how splendidly interesting! Take just the little fraction of it given up to the Czecho-Slovacs and the Jugo-Slavs . . . Serbs, Croats, Slovenes. . . . He had hitherto paid as little attention to them as to Lepidoptera and Coleoptera, and other families of bugs with Greek names, to whose history and habits, not being an entomologist, he was perfectly indifferent. He had never thought of them as possible factors in the future of Europe. Now that he was in touch with his kind again, London ceased to be a city of dreadful night. In his enthusiastic eyes it had almost become a *ville lumière*.

A week had wrought miraculous changes—that day the most miraculous of all. At the back of his delight, through the evening's rare entertainment ran a thrill of amazed happiness. A week ago he had floundered here derelict, lost, unwanted, a sick Chinaman his only link with humanity. Now he was safe on sunny seas, bound once more to life by friends, by a new-found son, in itself an adamantine tie, and, wonder of wonders, by the woman for whose sake he had revolutionized his existence and whose fragrant girlish memory had sanctified his after years.

He might have married well in China. Polygamy being recognized, the fact of his having a wife alive in England would not have rendered such a marriage illegal according to Chinese law. He had many opportunities, for he held a position there unique for a European; and a delicately nurtured Chinese lady can be an exquisite thing in womanhood, more than alluring to a lonely, full-blooded man. But ever between him and a not dishonourable temptation had floated the flower-shape of the English girl with her pink and white face and her light brown hair and her hazel eyes, through which shone her English wit and

her English understanding and her English love and her English soul. Not that he had eaten out his heart for twenty years for Marcelle. He had wiped her as a disturbing element clean out of his existence. His loyalty had been passive rather than active. He had made no attempt to throw open gates and go in search of her. But at hostile approach the gates had been uncompromisingly shut.

The wonder of wonders had happened. In one respect, the wonder of all possible wonders had happened.

There had been no disillusion.

In the gap of twenty years between girl and woman, what devastating life forces might have been at work, wiping bloom from cheek, dulling gleam from eyes, distorting lips, smiting haggard lines on face, hardening or unshapening sweet and beloved contours ; hardening, too, the mind, drying up the heart, arresting the development of the soul ? As he had never thought to see her in this world again, he had not speculated on such a natural life-change. It was only now, when he had met her in the gracious fullness of her woman's beauty, that he shivered at the thought of that which might have been and exulted in the knowledge of that which was. He remembered a woman, a friend of his wife, though much older, a lovely dream of a woman of the fair, frail type, who had disappeared from Cambridge for two or three years and then returned —suddenly old, as though a withering hand had passed over her face. No such hand had touched Marcelle. Then he pulled himself up and thought. How old was she ? Thirty-eight — thirty-nine ? Twelve years younger than himself. He laughed out loud. A mere child ! What could she yet have to do with withering hands ? Fifty—thirty-eight ! The hey-

day of life. What is fifty when a man feels as young as at twenty-five? Novelists and dramatists were responsible for the conventional idea of the decrepitude of man after forty. The brilliant and compelling works of fiction are generally the inspirations of young men who think the thirties are an age of incipient decay. "An old dangling bachelor who was single at fifty!" cries the abusive Lady Teazle. An old bachelor of fifty! Sheridan, of six-and-twenty, thought of Sir Peter as the lean and slippered pantaloon; and so has dramatic tradition always represented him.

"Damn it!" cried Baltazar, feeling his muscles as he strode about his bedroom, "I'm as hard as iron."

Satisfied with his youth, he sat down and wrote impulsive pages to Marcelle, which he posted in the hotel post-box before going to bed.

He ordered lunch the next day in the great room of the Savoy.

"I'm having my son," he said to the maître-d'hôtel, with a thrill at the new and unfamiliar word. "He has been wounded. I want the very best you can do for us." The maître-d'hôtel, pencil and pad in hand, made profuse suggestions. But Baltazar had forgotten the terms and indeed the items of European gastronomy. "I leave it in your hands. The best the Savoy can do. It's the first meal I've had with my son—since—— And wine. Champagne. What do you recommend?"

The maître-d'hôtel pointed to a 1904 vintage on the list. There was nothing better, said he. Baltazar agreed, suddenly aware that he knew no more of vintage wines than of artillery drill. His ignorance irritated him.

"Do you mind if I look at that for a little?"

The maître-d'hôtel handed him the wine list, and for half an hour he sat by a table in the great empty restaurant studying the names of the various wines and their vintages. Then, having mastered the information, he began, long before the appointed hour, to pace up and down the vestibule with an eye on every taxi-cab that swung round the rubber-paved courtyard and deposited its fares at the door, as impatient as any young subaltern waiting for his inamorata.

Very proudly he conducted Godfrey to the reserved table in the middle of the room. He would have liked to proclaim to each group of lunchers as he passed: "This is my son, you know. Wounded and decorated for valour." To those who regarded them with any attention, they were obviously father and son. But this Baltazar did not realize.

"My boy," said he, when the waiter had filled the two glasses, "I hope you like champagne. For myself I am a confirmed teetotaller. But I come from a land of strict ceremonial—and ceremonial ideas have got into my bones. Our first meal together—we must drink in wine to what the future has in store for us."

He smiled and held out his glass across the table. They touched rims. Baltazar took a sip, then put his champagne aside and filled a tumbler with mineral water. Godfrey was struck by the courtesy and suavity of manner with which his father conducted the little ceremony; also, as the lunch progressed, by his perfect hostship and by his charming conversation. The disconnected dynamo could be, when he chose, a very pleasant gentleman. By his tone and attitude he conveyed a man of the world's suggestion that this might be the beginning of an agreeable

acquaintance. Godfrey began to revise his first impression of his father. Confidence increasing, he yielded to subtle pressure and spoke in his English objective way about himself; about his schooldays, his ambitions, his entrance scholarship, his brief University career. He explained how his intimacy with Sister Baring sprang from the unfruitful pages of *Routh's Rigid Dynamics*.

"Oh! that's how she spotted you——?"

"That's how, sir. And then she told me she had read with you—and eventually all the rest came."

"Life is very simple," said Baltazar, "if we would only let it take its own course. It's when we begin to mess about with it ourselves that the tangles come."

'When the meal was ended and coffee and cigars were brought round, the young man threw off further garments of reserve.

"I wonder whether I may ask you a question, sir?"

"A million," replied Baltazar, "and I'll do my best to answer every one."

"It's only this. You were such a great mathematician when you left Cambridge. I've been wondering all the time since yesterday what has happened—whether you've chucked mathematics or what——"

"My boy," said Baltazar, "you've touched on tragedy."

"I'm sorry," said Godfrey.

"Oh, you haven't been indiscreet. By no means. You're bound to hear it sooner or later. So why not now? But it will take a little time. What are your engagements?"

"My afternoon is at your disposal, sir."

"Very good," said Baltazar. "I shall now pro-

ceed to tell you the amazing story of Spendale Farm, Quong Ho, and the Zeppelin."

Godfrey laughed. Youth that has drunk most of a bottle of perfect champagne can afford to be indulgent.

"That has quite an Oriental flavour," said he.

"A blend," smiled Baltazar.

The waiter, previously summoned, brought the bill. Godfrey, shrewd observer, noted with gratification that his father merely glanced at the total, and waved away the waiter with payment and tip all in the fraction of a second. But a little while ago he had lunched, grudgingly dutiful, with his uncle, Sir Richard Woodcott, who, when the bill was presented, had ticked off the items with a gold pencil, comparing the prices with the bill of fare, and had sent for the manager to protest against a charge for two portions of potatoes when only one was consumed, he being forbidden potatoes by his medical man. He had raised his voice and made a clatter, and neighbouring parties had smiled derisively and Godfrey had reddened and glowered and wished either that the earth would swallow him up or that hell-fire would engulf his millionaire uncle and trustee.

"I see now, sir," said he, "why I'm always broke to the world."

Baltazar flashed on him. "What do you mean?"

"I don't look at my bills either," said he.

Baltazar bent his keen gaze on his son. The remark had some significance. At first he was puzzled. Then the solution flashed on him.

"You're thinking of that damned Woodcott crowd."

Godfrey gasped. "How on earth do you know that?"

"I've lived in a country where, unless you guess

what the other fellow is thinking of, you may be led astray by what he says. It's a sort of game." He let the long ash of his cigar fall into his coffee-cup, and, remembering Quong Ho, added, with his queer honesty : " I don't pretend to be an adept, as you will gather from the tale which I propose to relate. Perhaps arm-chairs in a corner of the lounge might be more comfortable."

They rose. The heavily tipped waiter sprang to aid Godfrey with his crutches. The boy paused. Baltazar waved him courteously on.

" Go ahead."

On their way out they passed by a round table at which a large party were assembled. Suddenly a young officer sprang up and laid a hand on Godfrey's shoulder.

" Hallo ! Hallo, dear old chap ! It's years since I've seen you."

" Not since we've been in uniform."

" By Jove, that's true ! " He pointed to the M.C. ribbon. " Splendid, old chap, glorious ! "

" Glory all right," laughed Godfrey, " but," pointing downwards, " *sic transit*——"

" Oh, hell ! " said the other.

" Kinnaird," said Godfrey, " let me introduce you to my father."

Baltazar beamed. His quick eyes gathered curious glances from the luncheon party. It was a proud moment, inaugurating a definite parental position. He wrung the young man's hand cordially. Godfrey explained :

" Kinnaird and I were at Winchester and Cambridge together. He's a classical swell. When the war came it swallowed us up with different mouths." He turned to his friend. " Where have you been all the time ? "

"Gallipoli. Then a soft turn in Egypt. And you?"

"Flanders and France."

"I'm off to France next week."

"Let us meet before you go. Where are you to be found?"

They exchanged addresses. On leave-taking:

"I'm proud to have met you, sir," said Kinnaird. He turned and sat down at his table. Father and son continued their way to the lounge.

"Was that last remark of your friend," asked Baltazar, "unusual politeness, or did it mean anything?"

"Most of my University friends, sir," replied Godfrey, "know who my father was."

"Oh!" said Baltazar, with knit brows. "Oh, indeed! Anyhow, it was very polite. Look here, my boy," he went on, as they halted by a secluded and inviting little table, "I've been struck lately by an outward and visible sign of what seems to me to be an inward, invisible grace. When I was your age, having left school and masters behind me, I would have seen anybody hanged first before I called them 'sir'—except royalty, of course. Now I come back into the world as an elderly codger, and both of you young chaps 'sir' me punctiliously."

"I suppose the Army is teaching us manners," said Godfrey.

"Then the war is of some good, after all," commented Baltazar. "And this reversion to an ancient code provides you with a mode of address which saves you, my young friend, from considerable embarrassment."

Godfrey, quick and sensitive, glanced for an instant at the firm lips drawn down in a humorous smile and

at the kindly indulgence in the keen eyes, and then broke into a laugh.

"Let us be grateful, sir, to the *Chinoiserie* of the eighteenth century."

Baltazar folded his arms and contemplated his son admiringly.

"Do you know, I couldn't have got out of it like that if I had thought for a thousand years. Let us sit down." And when they had settled themselves by the wall on the fringe of the crowded lounge, he went on: "You young men are not the least problem which a Cyrano dropped from the peaceful moon like myself has to solve."

"I'm afraid we don't quite know what we're playing at ourselves," said Godfrey.

Again Baltazar felt pleased with the boy's reply. An understanding fellow; one who could get to the thought behind a few words.

"I wish to God I had known you all your life," said he.

At the appeal to sentiment, Godfrey shied like a horse.

"It wouldn't have affected what the war has made of me. I should have joined up just the same, and, just the same, I should have had a hell of a time in a perpetual blue funk which I had to hide, and should have come out minus a foot; and just the same, too, I should have wondered how on earth I'm going to stick the University—if I do go back—with its childish little rules and restrictions—to say nothing of its limited outlook."

"Two or three years ago," said Baltazar, following his son's lead, "if I heard a fellow of twenty talk about the limited outlook of the University of Cambridge, I should have said that his proper sphere

was the deepest inferno of insufferable young prigs provided by another ancient seat of learning situated also on the banks of a river. As your tutor, I should have had even nastier and more sarcastic things than that to say to you. But now, in this new and incomprehensible world, I'm perfectly ready to agree with you. What is there of the conduct or meaning of life that our dear old pragmatical drake of a Crosby and his train of ducks can teach men like your friend Kinnaird and yourself? It's like a bunch of hares sitting down before an old tortoise and being taught how to run. Isn't that the way of it?"

"I suppose it is," replied Godfrey, laughing. "I don't want to crab men like the Master. Nothing can take away their scholarship, which, after all, is vital to human progress—and, of course, as far as that goes, I'm perfectly willing to sit at their feet—but—well—I know you see what I mean, sir. It's very jolly of you, as one of the elder crowd, and very unusual, to be so sympathetic."

"I'll go further than that," said Baltazar. "As one of the elder crowd, I should like to have the benefit of your concentrated experience of modern life, and that is why I propose to tell you my story of Spendale Farm, Quong Ho, and the Zeppelin. It's my Ancient Mariner's tale, and you cannot choose but hear. But for the Lord's sake tell what you can remember to Sister Baring, for I'm sick to death of it."

It was nearly five o'clock when he had finished. Finding Godfrey a sensitive listener, he had expounded with many picturesque and intimate details the story which he had roughly told so often. The reason for his sudden self-condemnation to exile he had glossed

over, as he had done when first he had accounted for himself to Sheepshanks. Oddly enough, no one, not even this son of his, with the quick insight forced to maturity by the hot-house of war, boggled at the reason. All accepted his maniacal proceeding as in keeping with the impulsive eccentricity of his career. Besides, the mere fact of a man being able so to eliminate from his surroundings every whisper of the outside world as to live in England and remain in absolute ignorance of the war for a couple of years, staggered credulity and eclipsed minor considerations.

"Well," said Baltazar, with a big gesture of both arms, "that's how it is. To sum up. Eighteen years' blank ignorance of, and indifference to, European history—political, social, moral, artistic, scientific. A week's dismay and disgust. Two years' seclusion devoted to the consolidation of my life's work. The whole thing wiped out in a night. Awakening to find the world had been at war for two years. Myself adrift in a sort of typhoon, with not a human straw to cling to but my adopted son, this extraordinary mathematical genius of a Quong Ho. I fly to Cambridge to try to get some sort of sane attachment to life. I discover your existence. No sooner do I meet you than I'm thrown against the very woman for whose sake, as a young man, I chucked the whole of my career. And here am I, as strong as a horse. Feel that"—he tendered his arm and braced his muscle, and Godfrey gripping it proclaimed, with wonder, that it was like an iron bar—"and with a first-class working brain, and the country is crying out both for brains and muscle, and I'll go mad if I don't give the country my best. But at the same time, I'm just a month-old child. I'm dazed by everything. And I've got you and Marcelle and Quong Ho to

look after. You're all inextricably woven into the tapestry of my life. Mathematics and Chinese scholarship can go to the devil. Only the four of you matter——"

"Four?" Godfrey queried.

"Yes. Four. You, Marcelle, Quong Ho, and England."

"That's a tall order, sir," smiled Godfrey. "But as for me, I'm all right. I can fend for myself. You can cut me out."

Baltazar brought down his hand with a great thump on the little table.

"I'm damned if I do!" And to the waiter who ran up in some alarm: "Yes, tea. China tea. Gallons of it."

CHAPTER XV

BALTAZAR had asked his friend Burtingshaw, K.C., to suggest some sphere in which his gifts might be usefully employed by the nation. Burtingshaw, an unimaginative fellow, a professional exploiter of formulas, bade him become a special constable and join the National Volunteers. The man all agog to save his country, scoffed at the advice. If there was marching to be done and blows to be struck, he had far better enlist. Just like a Chancery lawyer to try to damp enthusiasm. He decided to bide his time, to adopt the unusual course of looking before he leaped. To judge by what he could gather from the Press and from conversation, it had been the crying fault of the Government from the beginning of the war to use razors to cut butter and wooden blades to perform delicate operations. There must be waiting in the vast war machine one particular lever which he of all men was qualified to pull. To find it would take time. But what was it? Godfrey's suggestions ran from vague to gloomy. Possibly he could find a billet in one of the new ministries springing up like mushrooms every day, or he might do Y.M.C.A. work, or drive a motor ambulance in France. All of which was as satisfactory to the perfervid patriot as the idea of joining the Special Constabulary or the National Volunteer Force. He rebelled at half-measures.

Meanwhile, his own house had first to be set in

order. He began operations by removing his worldly goods (easily contained in one suit-case and a large brown-paper package) to a comfortable hotel at Godalming, so as to be near Godfrey and Marcelle. The quiet, too, of a private sitting-room in a country inn conduced to the prosecution of certain studies which Professor Weatherley, admirable guide in the world-welter, had recommended. He took up his quarters, the most contented and sanguine of men. He had received a letter from Quong Ho, in faultless, Ciceronian English, conveying the news that he was well forward on the road to complete recovery, and in a few days would be in a fit condition to pursue whatever course of action his most venerated master might choose to prescribe. When he had disposed the books and pamphlets, contents of the brown-paper package, about his room, he sat down and wrote to Quong Ho. A room in the Godalming hotel was at Quong Ho's disposal as soon as he was fit to travel. It would be an admirable opportunity for him to meet Godfrey. They were to be brothers, mutually helpful: Godfrey, a past-master in the science of modern life but a neophyte in mathematics, seeing that he was struggling with such childish puzzles as the elements of Rigid Dynamics; Quong Ho, on the other hand, a neophyte in the science of modern life, but a past-master in elementary mathematics. It was important, he wrote, that Quong Ho's appearance should, as far as possible, be thoroughly European and his dress impeccable.

"Good Lord!" he cried aloud, throwing down his pen. "I clean forgot. The poor beggar hasn't a rag to his back!"

He drafted a telegram to the tailoring firm in the cathedral city, instructing them to supply Mr. Ho with

essential raiment, and then, continuing his epistle to his pupil, gave him safe counsel and his blessing, and enclosed a cheque to meet necessary expenses.

After which he lunched in the coffee-room with the appetite of the healthy man, lounged for a while with a pipe on the tranquil pavement outside the inn, and then went upstairs again, threw himself contentedly into an arm-chair with a German war publication lent him by Weatherley, and waited for Marcelle.

It was her afternoon of freedom. She had looked forward to the interview with mingled longing and apprehension. He had been the only man in her life, and it was all such a long time ago. The jealous grip of her nurse's work had fastened upon neck and shoulders, and bent the concentration of her being within a succession of little horizons. Men she had met and known intimately, men in thousands; but they were all suffering men, men whose sole appeal to her womanhood was their helplessness, their dependence. If there crossed her path a man with strong protective arm and compelling eyes, he was whisked away sound and whole beyond her horizon's misty rim. Now and then, but rarely, in haggard faces shone eyes of desire. Her sex revolted until experience taught her the nurse's cynical indifference. Of course there are the romances of nursing. In her long career she had known of many; of many, too, in which the resultant marriages had been all that is adumbrated by the ends of the fairy-tales. But no ghost of such a romance had ever come her way. And no romance had come her way in her restricted social life. Her holidays had been too rare and fleeting. Here and there, perhaps, a man had been attracted by her good looks and her graciousness, but

before these had had time to consolidate a first effect, she was miles away, back again in uniform between the eternal rows of beds. She had worked hard and seriously, the perfect nurse, accepting, without question, the hospital ward as the sphere ordained for her by destiny. Yet to soften the rigid life, she had fostered in her heart the memory of the brief and throbbing love of long ago.

During her drive from Churton Towers in the motor-cab, foolish trepidations beset her. Although her woman of the world's sound sense made mock of timidities, yet old-maidish instincts questioned the propriety of her proceeding. She was going to meet her former lover in a private room of an hotel. What about professional decorum? Matron, who kept a hard and unsympathetic eye on flirtatious tendencies in the junior staff, would regard her visit, should she come to know of it, as a horrifying escapade. She had seen her as she ran down the steps, hatted, gloved, prinked to her best, with a betraying flush (lobster colour, she thought) on her cheek; and being within earshot of the Gorgon, she had thrown the mere word "Godalming" at the chauffeur as she entered the car. When she gathered up courage to look at herself in the strip of mirror that faced her, her prejudiced eyes saw herself pale and haggard, smitten with lines which she had not noticed when she put on her hat. And all the time she knew that these feminine preoccupations were but iridescences on the surface of deep, black waters filled with fear, and that she was letting her mind play on them so as not to think of the depths.

Baltazar was waiting for her outside the hotel. Thus one little fear was sent packing. As a nurse she would have gone to Hell Gates to inquire for a

man. She had done it many a time in France. As Marcelle Baring she was restrained by futile hesitancies. As Marcelle Baring, a woman with her own life to lead, she was unfamiliar to herself. She had shrunk from entering the inn alone and asking for Mr. Baltazar. But there he was awaiting her on the pavement, and no sooner had the car stopped than he had opened the door and helped her to alight. And following him through the passage and up the narrow staircase, while he talked loud and cheery and confident, as though he defied gossiping tongues, and every minute turned to smile upon her, she remembered, with a little pang of remorse for unjust fears, that as now so it had been in the beginning; that there never had been a tryst hard or venturesome for her to keep, never one on which he was not there before her, big, responsible, inspiring confidence. He was singularly unchanged.

Obeying a breezy wave of the hand, she sank into an arm-chair. He shut the door and crossed the room, his face lit with happiness.

"For the first time in our lives we're together alone within four walls. You and I. Isn't it strange? We have to talk. Not only now, but often. As often as we can. It would have been monstrous of me to expect you to run up and down to London. Besides, there would have been no privacy. The lounges of the great hotels—I loathe them! A man and woman sit whispering in a corner and at once surround themselves with an atmosphere of intrigue. Horrible! And I couldn't come every day to Churton Towers—even ostensibly to see Godfrey. There would have been the devil to pay. All sorts of scandal. So I've made this my headquarters, in order to be near you."

The weather had turned raw and cold, and as she had driven in an open car, clad in light coat and skirt with nothing to warm her but a fur stole, she felt chilly, and welcomed the bright fire in the grate. She smiled, and said it was very cosy. He searched the room for a hassock, and finding one set it beneath her feet.

"We'll have tea soon, which will make it cosier," he said. He threw himself into an arm-chair on the other side of the fire. "It's like a fairy-tale, isn't it?"

She admitted the strangeness of the circumstances in which they had met, and with instinct of self-defence began to speak of Godfrey, of their suddenly formed friendship, of his manifold excellencies. Baltazar let her run on for a while, content merely to let his eyes rest on her and to listen to her voice. At last he rose, irrelevantly, and, striding across to her, held out both his hands. She could not choose but surrender hers.

"Can't you realize what you've been to me? 'All a wonder and a wild desire!'"

She fluttered a frightened glance at him and withdrew her hands. He stood looking down on her, one elbow resting on the mantelpiece.

"Do you remember? That Browning line—it was one of the last things I said to you. Then we lost our heads and broke off a delightful conversation. Why not continue it, starting from where we left off?"

"How can we go back twenty years?"

"By wiping out two hundred and forty unimportant months from our memories."

She glanced up at him and shook her head. It was the grey and barren waste of those two hundred

and forty months that formed the impassable barrier. In order to pick up the thread of that last talk it would be necessary to recapture the grace of those brief and exquisite moments.

"If we are to be friends," she said, "we must start afresh. All that—that foolishness has been dead and buried long ago."

"Buried, perhaps—or, rather, hidden away in a Sleeping Beauty sort of trance. But dead? Not a bit of it. It has been healthily alive all the time, and now—a magic touch—and it has reawakened strong and beautiful as ever."

"It's very easy to play with words and metaphors and analogies. You can make them appear to prove anything. As a matter of fact, we've both been subjected to the organic changes of twenty years. I can no more become the girl of eighteen than I can become the child of eight or the baby eight months old."

Baltazar put his hands in his pockets, laughed, turned away, and sat down again in his chair.

"We seem to have got on to the basis of a nice and interminable discussion. Let us get off it for the present. We have plenty of time. If I'm anything at all, I'm a man of illimitable patience."

She laughed out loud. She could not help it. A typhoon proclaiming its zephyrdom! And proclaiming it not jestingly, but with the accent of deeply rooted conviction.

"You? You patient? Oh, my dear——"

"There," he cried, jumping up from his chair. "You have called me 'my dear'!"

Quickly she retorted: "I didn't. At least, I didn't mean to. You caught me up in your patient way. I was going to call you my dear something—my dear sir—my dear man——"

"My name happens to be John," said Baltazar.

"'My dear John'? No. I wasn't going to say that."

"Why?"

"It sounds as if we had been married for twenty years."

With feminine instinct she had put her foot on his man's vanity and had used it, like a rock climber, as a projection to mount to safety. She saw him uncertain, unhumorous, and felt pleasurably conscious of advantage gained.

"You said it twenty years ago, at any rate."

She sat up victoriously in her chair. "I didn't. Never. I don't think I had the courage to call you anything. Certainly not John. I never even thought of you as John. As a label you were John Baltazar. But not John—short—like that. Oh no!"

"I suppose you're right," said Baltazar. "It's an idiot name. It's everything that's dull and prosaic in the English genius concentrated into one uninspiring vocable. Unlike other idiot names, it has no pleasing diminutive. 'Johnnie' is insulting. 'Jack' is Adelphi melodrama. Thank God I've been spared both. Now I burst upon you, after twenty years, as 'John,' and you naturally receive the idea with derision."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that," she cried. "Look at the great men of your name. John of Gaunt, John Knox, John Bunyan, John Locke, John Stuart Mill——"

"A merry crew of troubadours, aren't they?" said Baltazar.

Whereat they both laughed, and the situation, as far as it affected her, was relieved. They talked freely of the twenty years of their separation. She

of her work, her family; her mother, still alive, looked after by an elder sister, her brothers, both younger than herself, in the Navy. He, of China and his lamentable adventure on the moorland. He found that Godfrey, carrying out his request, had saved him from the abhorred recital of his story. Quong Ho aroused her curiosity and amused interest. She longed to see Quong Ho. Tea was set out in old-fashioned style and she presided at the table. She laughed at the wry face he made over the first sip of the good, strong Ceylon blend. Not the least dismal aspect of the tragedy of Spendale Farm, he explained, was the destruction of the chests of priceless tea which he had brought from China—stuff that yielded liquid and fragrant gold, lingering on the palate like exquisite wine.

"Damn the Huns for robbing me of my tea!" he cried, "besides damning them for a million other devilries. And yet the just man must give even Huns their due. They've done one good thing."

Marcelle flashed a protest. "They haven't. They're incapable of it. I've been in France, in the thick of it, close up to the Front—and I've seen things. I know. They haven't done one good thing."

"They have," said Baltazar. "They've brought you and me together."

"Oh!" said Marcelle rather foolishly. "I thought you were referring to something serious."

He fastened on the word. "Serious? Do you suppose that your presence here at this minute, with that little bitten-into piece of buttered toast between your finger and thumb, isn't the most serious fact in my life since I parted from you on the Newnham Road twenty years ago?"

She dropped the bit of toast into her saucer and regarded him with dismayed renewal of her earlier fears.

"Why spoil everything? We were beginning to get along so nicely."

He became aware of her piteous attitude. "What have I said?" he asked solicitously.

In distress, she replied: "What you mustn't say again. If you do, it's the end. It makes things impossible."

"I don't see why it should. If I weren't honest about it, it would be a different matter. But I am honest. I can't tell you that I've waited for you all these years, for the simple reason that I never dreamed I should see your face again. But I've been true to your memory. It has knocked out the possibility of any other woman. That's plain fact."

Womanlike, she said: "I suppose I've wrecked your life. Heaven knows I never meant to."

Then he rose and flung his arms out. His essential integrity spoke through his egotism. He tapped his broad chest.

"Wrecked my life? If a man's a man, do you suppose his life can be wrecked by anybody but himself? Do I look like a wreck? I've lived every minute of these twenty years to the full power of body and brain. If I made any appeal, on that score, to your pity or such-like sentiments, I should be a contemptible liar. If there's any question of playing the devil with lives, I did it with yours."

"Oh, no, no!" Her voice quivered and she sank back in her chair, with averted head. "Of course not. That's absurd."

"Well then," he asked, "what's all the fuss about? We loved each other when we parted. Pretty pas-

sionately and desperately, too. Why we shouldn't love each other now, when fate throws us together again, I can't understand."

She answered wearily : " I've told you. The years that the locust hath eaten."

" What locust ? "

" Ah ! " she sighed.

He took a pace or two towards the door, halted, turned and looked at her as she sat by the tea-table, and the pain in her eyes and the piteous twist of her lips smote him with remorse. A remarkable idea entered his head. He clinched the entrance by smiting his left palm with his right fist. Naturally any idea coming into Baltazar's head could not fail to be correct. He went behind her chair and laid his finger-tips on her shoulder.

" My dear," said he tenderly, " forgive me. I ought to have thought of it before. A beautiful and accomplished woman——"

She swerved round. " Oh, don't ! You mean that there may have been some one else—since——? Well, there hasn't. I've been far too busy." And seeing him incredulous of the fallibility of his idea, she added with a touch of petulance : " If there had been anybody, I should have told you so at once."

For the moment she wished there had been an intervening lover whose memory she could use as a rampart, for again she felt defenceless. If only Godfrey would come ! He had promised to call for her on his way back from London, whither he had been summoned by a Medical Board. She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. Godfrey's train would not arrive for another hour. With some apprehension she watched Baltazar, who was moving about the room in a restless, puzzled way.

"Don't you see you're spoiling it all?" she said. "And I haven't even finished my tea."

Laughter like quick sunshine lit his face. "A thousand pardons, Marcelle. I of all people to outrage the etiquette of tea-drinking!" He sat down. "Another cup, please. I shall get used to it soon. The Ceylon tea, I mean—not being with you."

She breathed again, rather wondering at the power of a light word. Of course she had learned the way of tactful dealing with querulous or obstinate patients. Had she instinctively applied the method to Baltazar? A flush crept into her cheek. Perhaps those were right who proclaimed that man sick or man sound was the same overgrown child. Hitherto she had regarded man sick with maternal indulgence. Was she to regard man sound, in the person of John Baltazar, from the same maternal point of view? It would be a change from the old one. For twenty years she had looked on the John Baltazar of thirty with the eyes of the girl of eighteen; and she had beheld him as a god. Now she looked upon the man of fifty with the eyes of the woman of thirty-eight. It was not that either of them had grown wondrously old. On the contrary, he appeared to have changed absurdly little, for his face had ever been eager and marked with the lines of thought which time had but accentuated; his figure had retained its athletic suggestion of strength and activity; and his manner had the fire and vehemence of youth. And she herself had received assurance from an anxiously consulted mirror, of beauty that endured, and physically she rejoiced in the consciousness of splendid health, enabling her to work untiringly at tasks that had all but prostrated her fifteen years ago; in which respect she was younger than ever. No, it was not that he was an old man and she an

old woman between whom the revival of romance would have been pathetically ludicrous. It wasn't that at all. . . . After she had handed him the cup of tea, she took up the long-abandoned bit of toast which she had dropped into the saucer. Laughing, he leaned forward and whipped from her fingers the cold and forlorn morsel, which he threw into the fire, and sprang to hand her the covered china dish from the warming hob.

"Not that unsacramental bit of bread," he cried.

It was not done rudely or bearishly; it was done in the most charming way in the world; done with a cavalier, conquering lightness, what the French call "*panache*," characteristic of the bright creature who had overpowered and overmastered her in her impressionable girlhood. She helped herself from the hot pile of toast, and her smile of thanks was not without a curl of ironic indulgence. The masterfulness of the proceeding in no way offended her, its manner being so perfect, but it did not strike the old romantic chord. Its symbolism flashed illuminatingly upon her. The god of the girl of eighteen to the woman of thirty-eight appeared merely as self-willed, erratic and vehement man. The glamour that had invested him faded like the colours of dawn, and the sunshine beat on him in a hard, mistless air. He stood before her in the full light. While she listened to his pleasant talk, her feminine subconsciousness observed him in clear definition. It admitted his many virile and admirable qualities; he was a man out of the common mould; he was ruthless in the prosecution of the lines of conduct which he laid down for himself—and these same lines had been inspired by high moral or spiritual ideals; in his egotism he might unthinkingly trample over your body in order to reach his ends, but at your cry

of pain he would be back in a flash, tearing himself to bits with remorse, overwhelming you with tenderness ; a man, too, of great intellect—in his own sphere, of genius ; a contradictory being, a hectoring giant, a wayward child, a helpless sentimentalist ; possibly, with all that, the overgrown baby of the nurses' tradition ; a man, possessing all the defects of his masculine qualities. Not a god. Nothing like a god. Just a man. Just an interesting, forceful, even fascinating man whom she was meeting for the first time. A brilliant stranger. She gasped at the swift realization, even while she smiled at his description of what passed for a hospital, at Chen Chow, the scene of Quong Ho's prim and passionless amours. A stranger. Yet memory had made familiar every gesture, every intonation. He had not changed. It was she who had changed. The fault lay in herself, baffling attempts at explanation. She began to accuse herself of callousness, deadness of soul, and at last conscience impelled her to make some sort of amends.

There remained but a quarter of an hour before Godfrey was due. She lit a cigarette from the match which Baltazar held out.

" I wonder," she said, with a little air of deliberation, " whether you would let me say something—and remain quite quiet ? "

He replied happily : " I swear I'll sit in this chair until you give me leave to get up. But why say it ? You've never let me finish what I want to tell you. It has to be told now, or a month or six months or a year hence. It's silly to waste time, so why not now ? I've awakened from a long sleep to find myself in a world of marvels, in a new, throbbing England, and for the first time in my life every pulse in me throbs with my country. I must play my part in the big

drama. I've also awakened to find even deeper and more passionate things gripping at my heart. My son, whom I never knew of. And you. You, Marcelle. No, no!" he laughed, "I'm not going to get up. I'll put the point in the most phlegmatic way possible. I love you now as much as ever I did. I want to marry you at once. I've been pursuing shadows for half a century. I want to get into the substance of life at last. A man can't do it by himself. He needs a woman, just as—to advance an abstract proposition—a woman needs a man. You're the only woman in the world for me. Together, you and I, we can go forth strong into this wonderful conflict. You can help me, I can help you. If you're tired and want rest, by God, you shall have it. You shan't do a hand's turn. But a smile and a whisper from you will fill me with strength for both of us. That's the proposition."

She looked for a long time into the fire, her head aslant, her lips and fingers accompanying her thoughts in nervous movements. Presently she said, in a low voice:

"A man like you would want the Sun, Moon and Stars."

"And would see that he got them," said Baltazar. "They're there right enough."

She shook her head despairingly.

"That's where you make the mistake. You would want what I couldn't give—what isn't in me to give. Don't you see it's no good? The whole thing is dead. I thought it was alive, but it isn't. It's dead. I'm dead. I suppose a nurse's work eventually unsexes a woman. That's frank enough, isn't it?"

"It's a frank statement of a conclusion arrived at through fallacious reasoning," replied Baltazar.

She shivered. "These things have nothing to do with reason. In all these years haven't you learned that?"

"No," said he. "Schopenhauer and his lot were idiots. Love is the apotheosis of reason. My dear," he added, rising, "this is profitless argument. I'm getting up without your permission, but I'll be as unobstreperous as thistledown. If you feel you can't marry me, well, you can't. The reasons you will find are perfectly logical—but throw away the rotten fallacy in your premise of sexlessness. You are woman all through, my dear, from your lips to your heart. Perhaps I've been rather like a bull at a gate—the gate of heaven. I suppose I was built like that. But if you'll let us be friends, dear friends, I won't worry you any more. I promise."

She broke down. Tears came.

"I'm so sorry—so sorry. But you do understand, don't you?"

"I don't say I understand, my dear," he replied very tenderly. "But I accept the phenomenon."

He turned and looked out of the window at the quiet road. Presently a taxi-cab drew up outside.

"Here's Godfrey," he said.

She rose. "I'll go down and meet him. It's no use his climbing all these difficult stairs."

"You'll come again, won't you?" And seeing a flicker of hesitation pass over her face, he added: "If only to let me show you Quong Ho."

"Yes, I'll come again," she replied, "if only to show you——"

"What?"

"That I'm sorry."

She moved quickly to the door, which he opened, and he followed her downstairs. In the vestibule they

met Godfrey. Gloom overspread the young man's candid face and dejection marked his behaviour, neither of which could be accounted for by the fact of the Medical Board having given him, as he announced, a further two months. Baltazar's proposal to run over soon to Churton Towers for a talk, he welcomed with polite lack of enthusiasm. He took leave with the solemnity of a medical man departing from a house with a corpse in it.

"It doesn't seem to be one of the House of Baltazar's lucky days," said Baltazar to himself, as he went up to his room.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was not till long afterwards that Baltazar learned the cause of his son's discomfiture. Marcelle learned it at once. The boy exploded with pent-up indignation. Dorothy had turned him down, callously turned him down. Could Marcelle imagine such heartlessness? He had gone to her after his Board. Seeing that she had undertaken to keep him in the army, it was only civil to report progress. Besides, the house had been open to him since childhood. Well, there she was alone in the drawing-room. Looked bewitching. Jolly as possible. Everything right as rain. Then, he didn't know how it happened—perhaps because she hadn't discouraged him at the Carlton—anyhow, there it was; he lost his head; told her he loved her, worshipped her and all the rest of it, and asked her to marry him. She broke into peals of laughter and recommended him not to be an idiot. She had the infernal impudence to laugh at him! If she had been a man he would have wrung her neck.

"And that isn't all," he cried. "What do you think she had the colossal nerve to tell me? That she was engaged to my brother Leopold. Leopold! 'Why,' I said, 'only the other day you informed me you were fed up with Leopold.' 'Oh, that,' she said airily, 'was before the engagement.' Apparently the brute's just home on leave and has stolen a march

on me. Easy enough with two feet," he added bitterly.

Marcelle tried to console. After all, he was very young, not yet one-and-twenty. It would be years before he could marry. He flared up at the suggestion. That was what Dorothy, a month older than he, had the cool cheek to say. What did age matter? He was as old as sin. He had all his life behind him. In the trenches alone he had spent twenty years. As for marrying, he was perfectly able to support a wife, not being, through God's grace, one of those unhappy devils of new army officers who were wondering what the deuce they would do to earn their living when the war was over. . . . She had treated him damnably. A decent girl would have been kind and sorry and let him down easily. But she!

"She treated me as though I were a lout of a schoolboy, and she a woman of thirty. Only the woman of thirty would at least have had manners. Well, she's going to marry Leopold. I wish her joy of him. She'll have a gaudy time."

Decidedly it had not been a lucky day for the House of Baltazar. Marcelle was oppressed by a sense of guilt for her share in the family disaster, and felt tragically unable to administer comfort. Yesterday she would have poured healing sympathy over the hurts of the evilly entreated youth, and her wrath would have flamed out upon the heartless minx who had spurned the love of a gallant gentleman. But to-day, how could she? Had not some horrible freak of chance put her in the same dock as Dorothy, worthless criminals both?

"I suppose you were very angry with her," she said timidly.

He flung out a hand. Oh, that inherited gesture!

Angry? Who wouldn't have been angry? He would never see her, speak to her, think of her again. He had told her so. As for receiving favours from General Mackworth, she was not to dare insult him by dreaming of it. Marcelle pictured a very pretty rumpus. Godfrey was not John Baltazar's son for nothing.

And she, in the modern idiom, had turned down John Baltazar; with less ostensible reason, for, after all, she had not engaged herself to another man. Was he, too, like his son, hurling anathema at the head of a faithless woman? Outwardly he had been very courteous, astonishingly gentle; but he was older and had learned self-restraint. How was he taking it now? She was very glad when they reached Churton Towers and when she stripped from herself the unfamiliar trappings of Marcelle Baring and put on the comforting impersonal uniform of the nurse.

Baltazar, however, carried out none of Marcelle's forebodings. He neither upbraided her nor smashed furniture, nor made one of his volcanic decisions. He merely lit a pipe and sat down and tried to think out his unqualified rejection. It was a second Zeppelin bomb, annihilating the castle in the air which that morning had appeared utterly solid and assured, as effectively as the first had wiped out Spendale Farm and all that it signified. He couldn't make head or tail of it. He sat a mystified man. For him the glamour of the old days had not faded. In her ripe woman's beauty she was more desirable than ever. Flashes had shown the continuance of her old wit and gaiety. Thank God she wasn't eighteen still. What would he do with a child of eighteen? The associa-

tion was unthinkable. But the woman into which she had developed was the ideal mate and companion. As for her being dead, that was rubbish. Never was woman more splendidly alive. . . . Now let him try to get her point of view. He clenched his teeth on his pipe. At eighteen she loved him. She made some sort of hero of him. She kept up her idealization until she met him an elderly, unromantic savage of fifty. Then her romance fell tumbling about her ears, and she said to herself, "Oh, Heavens! I can't marry *this*!"

It was the "*that*" which he had thought himself that the second bomb had sent into eternity. It took a lot of confused and blinking wonder for him to realize Marcelle's "*this*." Having realized, he accepted it grimly.

He had a little passage of arms with her some days afterwards. She had invited it, anxious to know how deeply she had wounded.

"I'm wretched because I feel I've again brought you unhappiness," she confessed.

"That you should be leading the life you wish to lead is my happiness," he replied, not insincerely.

"I feel so selfish," she said.

"Which means that if I pestered and blustered and raved and stormed and made your days a nightmare of remorse, you would end by marrying me out of desperation?"

She shrugged her shoulders helplessly. "I suppose I should."

"Then I'm hanged if I do it. You'd be merely a scared sort of slave of duty, suffering all the time from acute inflammation of the conscience. I being a product of human civilization, and not a German or a gorilla, or even a Hottentot, should be soon aware

of the fact, and our lives would be the most exquisite misery the mind could conceive."

"I can't see why you don't hate me," she said.

"I think I've arrived at an understanding of the phenomenon," he replied with a wry smile. "You might just as well try to recreate a vanished rainbow as a lost illusion." He smiled. "Go in peace," said he.

To himself he said: "I wonder what will be the next knock-down blow."

Not being able to take charge of Marcelle and Godfrey, who both seemed bent on going their respective independent ways, and Quong Ho still lingering at Water-End, Baltazar applied himself seriously to England. First he must learn, learn more fully the endless ramifications of national and international life that formed the nervous ganglion of that manifestation of activity known as the war. In pursuit of knowledge he not only read books, but eagerly availed himself of every opportunity of social intercourse. His circle of acquaintances grew rapidly. His three friends, loyal sponsors, had started him with the reputation of an authority on Far Eastern problems. He became a little lion and delighted in it like a child.

A great monthly review published an article on China written by a well-known diplomatist. It was so deplorably wrong in its failure to reach any possible Chinese point of view, that Baltazar shut himself up for a couple of days in his inn sitting-room and wrote a scathing refutation of the eminent sciolist's propositions. This, the ink on the last sheets scarcely dry, he put into an envelope and sent off to the editor. A week later the article was returned with the stereotyped form of rejection. In a fury Baltazar sought Weatherley and consulted him as to the quickest means

of wading in that editor's blood. Here was this monstrous ass, he shouted, who, on the strength of having passed a few months at the Embassy in Pekin, with his owl's eyes full of the dust politely thrown in them by bland Chinese officials, not knowing a word of any Chinese language written or spoken, without the vaguest idea of the thoughts or aspirations of the educated man in the interior of the kingdom, was granted the authority of a great review to spread abroad in this country the miasma of his pestilential ignorance. That stupendous and pernicious asses of his kidney should be allowed to mould British public opinion was a scandal of scandals. And when he, who knew, wrote to expose the solemn red-tape and sealing-wax dummy's imbecility, an equally colossal ass of an editor sent back his article as if it were an essay on Longfellow written by a schoolgirl.

"When you've finished foaming at the mouth, my dear J. B.," said Weatherley, "let me look at the manuscript. Ah!" he remarked, turning over the pages, "untyped, difficult to read, owing to *saeva indignatio* playing the devil with a neat though not very legible handwriting, and signed by a name calamitously unknown to the young and essentially Oxford Pennyfeather."

"Your serene equanimity does me a lot of good," growled Baltazar.

"You must advance with the times, my dear J. B.," laughed Weatherley. "Why on earth didn't you ring the man up, telling him who you were, and then have the thing typed?"

"Telephones and typewriters!" cried Baltazar. "This new world's too complicated for me."

"Never mind," said Weatherley. "Leave things in my hands. I'll fix up Pennyfeather. If he persists

in his obscurantism, owing to a desire to save his face, I'll send the article to Jesson of *The Imperial Review*, who'll jump at it."

"I accept your help gratefully," replied Baltazar. "But all you've said confirms me in my opinion that your friend Pennyfeather is a lazy, incompetent hound. He and his jejune magazine can starve to death."

He laughed after a while at his own vehemence. They talked of the points at issue. Presently Weatherley said :

"After all, you're two years behindhand in Chinese affairs. Chinese adherence to the Allied Cause is of vast importance. Why don't you go out again on behalf of the Government and pick up the threads ?"

Baltazar burst out :

"I go back to China ? That God-forgotten country of dead formulas, in which I've wasted the prime of my life ? No, my dear friend, never again. I'm here at last, among my own people, in the most enthralling moments in the history of the civilized world. For years I looked upon myself as a damned Chinaman, and now I've woke up to find myself English. And English I'm going to remain."

"But," objected Weatherley, "by undertaking a Government mission in China, you can remain as English as you please."

Baltazar refused to consider the suggestion. England, his rediscovered country, was his appointed sphere of action. No more China for him as long as he lived. He went away almost angry with Weatherley for putting such an idea into his head. No doubt he might be useful out there : much more useful than a diplomatist like the arid ass who had written the article ; but to bury himself there again and leave

Godfrey and Marcelle and the throbbing wonders of his resurrection, was preposterous. As he descended Weatherley's staircase a shiver of dismay ran down his spine. A walk through the streets restored his equanimity. Those crowds which once had seemed so alien were now his brothers, all fired by the same noble aspirations. He would have liked to shake hands with the soldiers from far overseas, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and thank them for their inspiring presence. The day was fine, the exhilaration of the Somme victories was in the air. The new mystery of the tanks exercised all London, which still showed the afterglow of the laughter caused by continued humoristic descriptions in the morning papers. A tank waddled up to a house filled with Germans, leaned against it in a comfortable way, and there was no more house and no more Huns. He heard scraps of conversation about them as he walked. Yes. Tennyson was right—a bit of a seer after all that Incarnation of Victorianism—when he remarked that fifty years in Europe were preferable to a cycle in Cathay. He went in gayer mood to lunch with Jackman at a club in the West End, for membership of which his host had proposed him. The club, like many London clubs, being hard hit by the war, had taken the unprecedented step of holding an autumn election for all candidates duly proposed and seconded. Baltazar found invited to meet him a little party of influential members. He went back to Godalming forgetful of Weatherley's idiocy.

A few days afterwards he met Weatherley by appointment at his chambers in the Temple. A group of publicists outside professional journalism, of which Baltazar guessed his friend to be one of the initiative forces, were about to bring out a new weekly

review, devoted to the international phases of the war ; to all racial questions from Greenland to New Guinea. Its international outlook would be unlimited, but, of course, it would pursue a relentless anti-German policy. Would Baltazar care to join the band ? If so, would he attend a meeting of the founders of the Review that afternoon ?

" My dear fellow," cried Baltazar, holding out both his hands, " it's meat and drink to me."

" You'll take up the Far Eastern end of the thing," said Weatherley.

" I'll write about China till I'm dead, if you like," said Baltazar, " so long as I don't have to go back to the infernal country."

Again, after the meeting, Baltazar returned to Godalming in a glow. Thanks to Weatherley, he had at last got a footing in the Great Struggle.

In a telephone talk with Marcelle he told her all about it. He heard a ripple of laughter.

" Where does the fun come in ? " he asked.

Her voice said : " You're so young and enthusiastic. You ought to be the son and Godfrey the father."

" By the way," said he, " what's the matter with Godfrey ? He's about as cheerful as a police-court in a fog."

Marcelle, who could not betray Godfrey's confidence, attributed his depression to the tediousness of his recovery and the uncertainty of the future.

" Of course, of course ! " replied Baltazar penitently. " I'm a selfish beast, never entering into other people's feelings. I must brighten things up for him."

The opportunity came very much sooner than Baltazar had any reason to anticipate, in their meeting

with Lady Edna Donnithorpe in the lounge of the Carlton.

Young, beautiful, royally assured, she advanced laughing to Baltazar.

"What about your promise, Mr. Baltazar? Piecrust?"

He had sat next her at dinner a week before and she had invited him to come to tea one afternoon; to have a quiet, interesting talk, she said, away from crowds of disturbing people. She was the wife of the Parliamentary Secretary of one of the new ministries, the daughter of the Earl of Dunstable, and in other ways a woman of considerable importance. Her radiant photographs recurred week after week in the illustrated papers. Gossip whispered that she had turned the Prime Minister round her little finger, and that when he had recovered from dizziness he found he had given her elderly and uninspiring husband a place in the Government. Certainly no one was more surprised than Edgar Donnithorpe himself. That he owed his advancement to his wife was common knowledge; but alone of mortals he was unaware of the fact. When asked by a friend why she had gone to so much pains, she replied: "To get Edgar out of the way and give him something to play with." She was twenty-five, pulling a hundred strings of fascinating intrigue, a flashing member of scores of war committees, and contrived for herself illimitable freedom.

Baltazar made his apologies. He meant to keep his promise, but it required courage on the part of such a back number as himself.

"Back number?" she cried. "Why, on your own showing, you've only been in existence a few weeks. You are the newest thing in numbers in London."

"It is gracious of you to say so," replied Baltazar.

Then, as she gave no sign of withdrawal: "Lady Edna, may I introduce my son—Lady Edna Donnithorpe."

"I thought it must be. How do you do?" There were dove-notes in her voice which, to the young man's fancy, invested the commonplace formula with caressive significance; her liquid dark blue eyes regarded him understandingly and pityingly; her hand lingered in a firm clasp for just an appreciable fraction of a second.

"Don't you agree with me about your father? You and I are old, wise, battered people compared with him?"

Youth spoke to youth, making gentle mock of middle age—and youth instantly responded.

"My father," replied Godfrey, drinking in her laughing beauty and her sympathetic charm, "has brought back from China all sorts of quaint notions of filial piety—so, until I know whether my opinions of him are pious or not, I rather shy at expressing them."

She beamed appreciation. "I have a father, too, and although he has never been to China, I sympathize with you. One of these days we'll have a little heart-to-heart talk about fathers."

"I should love to," replied Godfrey.

"Would you really? Are you sure faithlessness is not hereditary in your family?"

"Lady Edna," said Baltazar, holding out the signet ring on his little finger. "If you saw this motto of our ancient Huguenot family in a looking-glass, you would read '*Jusqu'à la mort.*' The word *fidèle*, of course, being understood."

"Death is a long way off, let us hope," she laughed. "But if the family faithfulness will last out—*jusqu'à jeudi*—no—I can't manage Thursday—I'll give it one

day more—say Friday—may I expect you both to lunch with me? You have my address—160 Belgrave Square."

Receiving their acceptance of the invitation, she shook hands and went across the lounge to her waiting friends.

"A most interesting type," said Baltazar. "A woman of the moment."

"She's wonderful!" said Godfrey. And as her head was turned away, he looked long and lingeringly at her. "Wonderful!"

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN he hobbled into her drawing-room and saw her without her hat, crowned with the glory of her hair, thick, of silky texture and of baffling colour, now almost black, now gleaming with sombre gold, and her slender figure clad in a blue dress which deepened the magical blue in her eyes, Godfrey thought she was more wonderful still. The clasp of her bare hand with its long, capable fingers, thrilled him. Her voice had the added caress of welcome to her house. When, later, she reminded him of the promised heart-to-heart talk about fathers, it was in his heart to say, "The pedantic old bat calls you a type—you, unique among women!" The criticism had buzzed in his head all the week and on occasions he had laughed out loud at its ineptitude. It buzzed in his head while he was being introduced to Lady Northby, the wife of a distinguished General, and it was with an effort that he cleared his mind enough to say:

"I had the honour of serving under the General in France. Oh, a long, long way under, all the time I was out."

"Then you're friends at once," cried Lady Edna. "You'll join Lady Northby's collection."

"Of what, pray?" asked Baltazar.

"Of Sir Edward's officers."

"I don't know whether Mr. Baltazar would like to

be collected," said Lady Northby. She was a tiny, dark-faced, kind-eyed woman of fifty. Her smile of invitation was very pleasant.

"Can you doubt it?" replied the young man. "It must be a glorious company. I'm only afraid I'm a poor specimen."

"Won't you sit down?" She indicated a place on the sofa by her side. And when Godfrey had obeyed her, she said in a low voice: "That and that" —with the faintest motion of her hand she indicated decoration and footless leg—"entitle you to a place of honour." Then as if she had touched sensitive ground, she added hastily, almost apologetically: "Lady Edna always teases me about my collection, as she calls it; but there's a little truth in it. My husband is very proud of his Division, and so am I, and the only way I can try to realize it as a living thing, is to get to know some of his officers."

"By Jove!" cried Godfrey, his eyes suddenly sparkling. "That accounts for it."

"For what?"

"For the Division being the most splendid Division, bar none, at the Front. For the magical influence the General has over it. I've only seen him once or twice, and then I shook in my boots as he passed by. But there isn't an officer or man who doesn't feel that he's under the tips of his fingers. I never could account for it. Now I can."

She smiled again. "I don't quite follow you, Mr. Baltazar."

Suddenly he became aware of his audacity. Subalterns in social relations with the wives of their Divisional Generals were supposed to be the meekest things on earth. He was not sure whether their demeanour was not prescribed in paragraph something or the

other of King's Regulations. His fair face blushed ingenuous scarlet. In the meanwhile in her eyes shone amused and kindly inquiry; and, to render confusion worse confounded, Lady Edna and his father appeared to have suspended their casual talk in order to listen to his reply. There was no help for it. He summoned up his courage, and with an invisible snap of the fingers said:

"It was you behind the Division all the time."

The modest lady blushed too. The boy's sincerity was manifest. Lady Edna rose with a laugh, as a servant entered the room.

"The hand that rocks the subaltern rules the Division. Let us see if we can find something to eat."

There were only the four of them. At first Lady Edna Donnithorpe had thought of inviting a numerous company to meet Baltazar. Her young consciousness of power delighted in the homage of the fine flower of London around her table. Baltazar's story (heard before she met him) had fascinated her, he himself had impressed her with a sense of his vitality and vast erudition, and after the dinner party she had been haunted by his personality. Here was a great force at a loose end. How could she apply it? People were beginning to talk about him. The new Rip Van Winkle. The Freak of the War. It would be a triumph to manœuvre him into the position of a National Asset. She had already drawn up a list of the all-important people whom it was essential for him to know—her husband did not count—and was ticking off the guests for the proposed luncheon party when suddenly she tore it up, she scarcely knew why. Better perhaps gauge her protégé more accurately before opening her campaign. The son added a

complication. A fine pathetic figure of a boy. Perhaps she might be able to do something for him, too, if she knew what he wanted. She liked his eyes and the set of his head. Besides, the stuffy lot who would be useful to the father would bore the young man to death. She regarded the boredom of a guest in her house as an unimaginable calamity. Edgar, her husband, was the only person ever bored in it, and that was his own doing. He had reduced self-boredom in private life to a fine art. She decided that young Baltazar should not run the risk of boredom. Having torn up her list, she ran across Lady Northby, dearest of women, the ideal fourth.

At the beginning of lunch, while Baltazar happened to be engaged in eager argument with Lady Northby, she devoted herself to Godfrey. In her sympathetic contralto she questioned him, and, under the spell of it, he answered. He would have revealed the inmost secrets of his soul, had she demanded them. As it was, he told her an astonishing lot of things about himself.

Presently the talk became general. Lady Northby, in her gentle way, shed light, from the point of view of a divisional commander's wife, on many obscure phases of the war. Lady Edna held a flaming torch over black and abysmal corners of diplomacy. Godfrey sat awed by her knowledge of facts and her swift deductions from them. He had never met a woman like her, scarcely dreamed that such a woman existed. She had been in personal touch with all the great ones of the earth, from the Kaiser upwards, and she judged them shrewdly and with a neat taste in epigram.

"If the Kaiser and the Crown Prince had been ordinary middle-class folk," she said, "they would

have been in gaol long ago. The father for swindling the public on a grand scale ; the son for stealing milk-cans."

She had met King Constantine, then a thorn in the Allied flesh, whose sufferance for so long on the Greek throne is still a mystery to the plain Briton.

"What a degradation of a name for Constantine the Great," said Baltazar.

"That's just it," she flashed. "His awful wife says '*In hoc signo vinces*,' and dangles before his eyes the Iron Cross."

No. Godfrey had never met a woman remotely like her. She was incomparable.

The talk developed quickly from the name of Constantine to names in general. The degradation of names. Uriah, for instance, that of the most tragic victim of dastardly treachery in history, now brought low by its association with Heep.

"I love the old Saxon names," said Lady Northby, with some irrelevance. "Yours, dear, for instance."

"It's a beautiful name," said Baltazar, "but it's not Saxon. It's far older."

"Surely it's Saxon," said Lady Edna.

"Edna was the wife of Raguel and the mother-in-law of Tobias, the son of Tobit, the delightful young gentleman carrying a fish and accompanied by the Angel Raphael, whom you see in the Italian pictures."

Lady Edna was impressed. "I wonder if there's anything you don't know ? "

He laughed. "I only remember what I've read. My early wrestling with Chinese, I suppose, has trained my memory for detail. I'm also very fond of the Apocrypha. The Book of Esdras, for instance, is a well of wonderful names. I love Hieremoth and Carabasion."

Presently she said to Godfrey: "Your father always makes me feel so humble and ignorant. Have you ever read the Apocrypha?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Neither have I. If you said you had, I should want to sink under the table. The pair of you would be too much for me."

Her confession of ignorance delighted him as much as her display of knowledge filled him with wonder. It made her deliciously human.

When lunch was over and they went up to the drawing-room she left the elders together and sat for a while apart with him.

"You'll go and see Lady Northby, of course," she said.

"I should just think so," he replied boyishly. "You see, I'm New Army and have never had a chance of meeting a General's wife. If they're all like that, no wonder the Army's what it is."

Lady Edna smiled indulgently. "She's a dear. I thought you would fall in love with her."

"But you couldn't have known I was in General Northby's Division, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you're a witch."

With a quick glance she read the tribute in his young eyes. It almost persuaded her that she possessed uncanny powers. She looked charmingly mysterious.

"Let us leave it at that," she said. "Anyhow," she added, "Lady Northby can be very useful indeed to a young officer."

"Useful?" His cheek flushed. "But I couldn't go to see any lady—socially—with the idea of getting things out of her. It would be awful."

"Why?"

He met her eyes. "It's obvious."

She broke into pleasant laughter. "I'm so glad you said that. If you hadn't, I should have been dreadfully disappointed."

"But how could you have thought me capable of such a thing?"

His real concern touched her. Inured to her world of intrigue which had little in it that was so sensitive on the point of honour, she had taken for granted his appreciation of Lady Northby's potential influence. She was too crafty a diplomatist, however, to let him guess her surprise, still less suspect her little pang of realization that his standards might be just a trifle higher than her own; or her lightning glance back to her girlhood when her standards were just the same. She gave him smilingly to understand that it was a playful trap she had set for him, so that resentment at an implied accusation was instantaneously submerged beneath a wave of wonder at the gracious beauty of her soul. This boy of twenty, instinctive soldier, half-conscious thereof when he came to exercise his power, could play on fifty rough and violent men as on an instrument, and make them do his bidding lovingly in the ease of camp and follow him in battle into the jaws of death, as they had done; but he was outclassed in his unwitting struggle with the girl of five-and-twenty, instinctive schemer after power, her clear brain as yet undisturbed by any clamourings of the heart.

Baltazar, desiring to bring brightness into the boy's life, had brought it with a vengeance. He had not heard of Dorothy. He had no idea of the state of mind of the Rosaline-rejected young Romeo of a son of his. Unconscious of peril, he cast him into the furnace. "An interesting type. A woman of the

moment," commented placid and philosophic Fifty. "Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" sang Twenty. Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. See the part of Romeo *passim*. Away with Rosaline! His "love did read by rote and could not spell." Rosaline-Dorothy was blotted out of his Book of Existence for ever.

"What are your plans?" asked Lady Edna, as soon as the little cloud had melted beneath the very eager sunshine.

"As soon as I get a new foot I'll spend every day at the War Office until they give me something to do."

"You oughtn't to have any difficulty. There are lots of billets going, I know."

"Yes. But what kind? I'm not going to sit in an office all day filling up forms. I want to get a man's job. Active service again."

"How splendid of you!"

Her commendation was something to live for. After the British way, however, he deprecated claims to splendour.

"Not a bit. It's only that one feels rather rotten doing nothing while other fellows are fighting. They may take me in the Flying Corps. But I'd sooner go where I belong—to the job I know. Perhaps I'm rather an ass to think of it."

"Not at all. Where there's a will there's a way."

"I'm going to have a try for it, anyhow," said he.

He thought vindictively of Dorothy's light patronage, which would have resulted in a soft job. No soft jobs for him. He had had a lucky escape. Dorothy and her inconsequence and flapperish immaturity, and the paralysing work that General Mack-

worth would doubtless have found for him—recording issues of bully-beef or keeping stock of dead men's kits! Never in life! In those bright eyes raining influence—no, they were not bright—they were muffled stars—that was the fascination of them—he would make himself something to be considered, respected, admired. He would be the one one-footed man in the British Army to arrive at greatness. The splendid end compelled the means. Until that moment he had never contemplated an heroic continuance of his military career.

Lady Edna, pathetically young, in spite of myriad ageing worldlinesses, including a half-humorous, half-repellent marriage of calculation, was caught by his enthusiasm.

"I should love to see you back again!"

"That alone is enough," said he, "to make me move heaven and earth to get there."

She flushed beneath his downright eyes and hid a moment's embarrassment by a laugh.

"That's a very pretty speech," she said lightly. "I'm glad to find the Army is going back to its old tradition of manners."

"I perfectly agree with you," exclaimed Baltazar, for her tone had been purposely pitched higher than that of the preceding conversation. "I've been greatly struck by it."

The little intimate talk was over; but enough had been said, before father and son took their leave, to make Godfrey treasure every one of her beautiful words and repeat them over and over again. Especially her last words, spoken in a low voice for him alone: "I don't want to lose track of you. One so often does in London. If ever you're at a loose end, come and report progress. Ring me up beforehand." She

gave him her number. Victoria 9857. A Golden Number. The figures had a magical significance.

It was not long before he ventured to obey her, and rang up the Golden Number. He spent with her an enchanted hour, the precursor of many hours which Lady Edna stole from her manifold activities in order to devote them to the young man's further enchantment.

In the meanwhile Quong Ho arrived at Godalming. Quong Ho delighted with himself, in his ready-made suit and soft felt hat, in spite of the loss of his pig-tail, which the treatment of his cracked skull had necessitated. Baltazar, too, cast an eye of approbation on his European appearance, regarding him somewhat as a creation of his own. His pride, however, was dashed by Godfrey, who on being asked, eagerly, after the first interview, what he thought of Quong Ho, cried :

"For Heaven's sake, sir, get the poor devil a new kit!"

"Why—why?" asked Baltazar, in his impatient way. "What's the matter with his clothes?"

"They fit like a flag at the end of a pole in a dead calm," said Godfrey. "Or like sails round a mast. You'd have to get a pack of hounds in order to find his arms and legs. And that red and purple tie! It's awful. Ask Marcelle."

Baltazar had walked Quong Ho over to Churton Towers, and after thay had said good-bye at the gates, he had rushed back to put his question, leaving Quong Ho in the road.

Marcelle smiled at his disconcerted face. "It would be scarcely well received at Cambridge."

"Give the chap a chance, sir," said Godfrey.

"I want to give him every chance," exclaimed Baltazar. "I want to overwhelm him with chances. If his clothes won't do, get him some others."

At his summons the Chinaman came up. Baltazar caught him by his loose sleeve.

"Godfrey doesn't approve of garments not made to the precise measurements of the individual human figure. He'll take you to his tailor and hosier and hatter and rig you out properly. He knows what's right and I don't. When can you do it? The sooner the better."

"I'll see what my engagements are," said Godfrey stiffly.

"That's right," cried Baltazar. "Telephone me this evening. His time's yours. Get him all he wants. Brushes, combs, shirts, pyjamas, boots. You know."

He wrung his hand, waved his hat to Marcelle and marched off with Quong Ho.

Godfrey regarded the retreating figures speechless. Then he turned to Marcelle.

"Of all the cool cheek! Without by your leave or with your leave! I'm to cart this infernal Chinee about Bond Street. My God! My tailor will have a fit."

"So long as Quong Ho gets one, it doesn't matter," laughed Marcelle.

But he was in no humour for pleasantry. He dug his crutch viciously in the ground as he walked.

"He takes it for granted that I'd love to be saddled with this scarecrow of a Chinaman. Don't you see? It's preposterous. My God! I've a jolly good mind to set him up regardless, like a pre-war nut—with solid silver boot-trees and the rest to correspond. It would serve J. B. right."

Said Marcelle with a sidelong glance—in her Sister's uniform she looked very demure—

"Why didn't you refuse?"

He fumed. "How could I? I couldn't hurt the poor chap's feelings. Besides——"

"Besides what?"

"This father of mine—his big gestures, his ugly mouth—and his infernal dancing eyes—and behind them something so pathetic and appealing—I don't know. Sometimes I think I loathe the sight of him, and, at others, I feel that I'd be a beast if I shut my heart against him. And always I feel just like a rabbit before a boa-constrictor. I'm not a little boy. I've seen life naked. I'm on my own. I object to being bossed. In the Army it's different—it's part of the game; but outside—no!"

He limped along to the house full of his grievance. It was not so much the clothing of Quong Ho that annoyed him, though he could well have spared himself the irritating embarrassment, as the sense of his gradual subordination to a dominating personality. The disconnected dynamo was hitching itself on to him, and he resented the process.

"How you've escaped being married out of hand, I don't know," said he.

Marcelle flushed. "The moment he realizes other people's feelings," she replied, "he becomes the gentlest creature on earth."

"I wish to goodness he'd begin to realize mine," growled the young man.

When they reached the front steps of Churton Towers, Marcelle said:

"I wonder whether I could be of any help to you in your shopping?"

"You? Why——" He beamed suddenly on her.

"I'm free on Friday. I could go up to town with you."

"You're an angel!" he declared. "A winged angel from heaven." The boy in him broke out sunnily. "That'll make all the difference. What a dear you are. Won't we have a time! I'll love to see you choosing the beast's pyjamas."

"They shall be stout and sober flannel," said Marcelle.

"No. Silk. Green, red, yellow and violet. The sort of thing the chameleon committed suicide on."

"Who's going to run the show—you or I?"

"Oh, you. You all the time."

He laughed and hobbled up the steps in high good-humour.

Marcelle went off to her duties smiling pensively. What a happy woman would be the right woman for Godfrey. Wax in her hands—but wax of the purest. She was astonished at the transformation from cloud to sunshine which she, elderly spinster nearly double his age, had effected, and her nerves tingled with a sense of feminine power. Her thoughts switched off from son to father. They were so much alike—from the feminine point of view, basically children. Were not her fears groundless? Could she not play upon the man as she played upon the boy? Recent experience answered yes.

But then she faced the root difference. To the boy she surrendered nothing. To the man she would have to pay for any measure of domination the price of an indurated habit of existence, the change from which was fraught with intolerable fear. No. She could take, take all that she wanted. But she could not give. There was nothing in her to give. Better this beautiful autumn friendship than a false recrudes-

cence of spring, in which lay disaster and misery and disillusion.

As for the boy, God was good to have brought him into her life.

Meanwhile, Baltazar walked home to Godalming with Quong Ho in gay spirits. It was just like the modern young Englishman to shy at the depths and attack the surface. And, after all, as a more alert glance assured him, the surface of Quong Ho deserved the censure of any reasonable being. One could almost hear his garments flap in the autumn wind.

"I fear," said Quong Ho apologetically, "that my care in selecting this costume was not sufficiently meticulous."

"Godfrey'll soon put that right," laughed Baltazar. "Anyhow, it's the man inside the clothes that matters."

And when he came to think of it, he perceived that the man inside had had little opportunity of revealing himself, he, Baltazar, having done the talking for the two of them. Quong Ho had comported himself very ceremoniously. His manners, though somewhat florid in English eyes, had been unexceptionable, devoid of self-consciousness and awkward attempts at imitation. He had responded politely to the conventional questions of Marcelle and Godfrey, but there his conversation had stopped. Of the rare gem presented to them they had no notion. Never mind. Once let Quong Ho give them a taste of his quality, and they could not choose but take him to their bosoms.

Which, by the end of the Friday shopping excursion, was an accomplished fact.

Now that Marcelle had assumed responsibility, Godfrey, after the way of man, regarded the attiring of Quong Ho as a glorious jest. His bright influence

melted Quong Ho's Oriental reserve. Encouraged to talk, he gave them sidelights on the life at Spendale Farm which neither had suspected. His description, in his formal, unhumorous English, of the boxing lessons, delighted Godfrey.

"The old man must be a good sport," he remarked to Marcelle.

"Ah!" said Quong Ho, bending forward—they were in the train—"A 'sport' is a term of which I have long desired to know the significance. Will you have the gracious kindness to expound it?"

"Lord! That's rather a teaser," said Godfrey. "I suppose a sport is a chap that can do everything and says nothing, and doesn't care a damn for anything."

Quong Ho nodded sagely. "That is most illuminating. I regret that I have not my notebook with me. But I shall remember. Incidentally, you have summed up exactly the character of your honourable father and my most venerated patron."

"He's a joy," Godfrey whispered to Marcelle as they left the train. "I could listen to him all day long. He talks like the books my grandmother used to read when she was a kid. Mr. Ho," said he, as they proceeded up the platform to the gates, "you have now a unique opportunity of studying the Western woman. Miss Baring is going shopping. You see in her eye the sign that she is going to have the time of her life."

"Madam," said Quong Ho, taking off his hat, to the surprise not only of Godfrey but of the scurrying passengers, "that is also the superlative achievement of the ladies of my country."

They shopped, they lunched merrily in a select little restaurant off Shaftesbury Avenue, they shopped again.

Godfrey stood aloof and gave advice ; sketched the programme in broad outlines ; Marcelle filled in the details and became responsible for the selection of the various articles ; Quong Ho smiled politely and submitted the various parts of his body to be measured. Only once did he venture to interfere, and that was when Marcelle was matching ties and socks in the Bond Street hosier's.

" I beg most humbly your pardon," said he, picking out a tie other than the one selected, " but this shade is the more exact."

" Surely it's the same," exclaimed Marcelle, putting the ties together.

" The gentleman is right, madam," said the shopman. " But not one person out of ten thousand could tell the difference. I couldn't, myself, if I hadn't been trained at Lyons. I wonder, madam, whether you would allow me to try a little experiment ? "

He disappeared into a back room and returned with a pinkish mass of silk threads.

" This is a colour test. There are twenty different shades. Can you sort them ? "

Godfrey, amused, took half the mass, and for several minutes he and Marcelle laboriously sorted the threads. Presently the shopman turned to Quong Ho.

" Now you, sir."

Quong Ho, without hesitation, made havoc of the piles and swiftly arranged the twenty groups in an ascending scale of red.

" There's not another man in London who could have done that under an hour," said the shopman admiringly.

" When did you learn it ? " asked Godfrey.

" Vain boasting, sir," replied Quong Ho, " is far from my habits, but to me these differences are as

obvious as black from white. It is only a matter of informative astonishment that they are not perceptible both to you and "—he took off his hat again—" to the most accomplished madam."

" Look here, old chap," said Godfrey, " what I want to know is this. How could you, with your exquisite colour sense, go about in that awful red and purple tie ? "

" To assume the perfection of English pink," replied Quong Ho, " I would make any sacrifice. At the same time, it gives me infinite satisfaction to discover that the taste of Water-End is not that of the metropolis. *Non omnes arbusta juvant humilesque myricæ.*"

" I beg your pardon ? " cried Godfrey, with a start, almost upsetting the high counter chair on which he was sitting.

Quong Ho, perched between Godfrey and Marcelle, turned with a smile.

" It is the Latin poet Virgilius."

" Yes, I know that."

" He says that shrubs and other bucolic appurtenances do not please everybody—by which he means the sophisticated inhabitants of capital cities, who prefer such delectable harmonies of colour "—he waved a hand to the pile of shirts, socks, ties and pyjamas on the counter—" to the red and purple atrocities which form the delight of the rural population."

Godfrey, elbow on counter and head on hand, regarded him wonderingly.

" Mr. Ho," said he, " you're immense. Do tell me. I don't mean to be impertinent. But for a Chinaman to quote Virgil—pat—How do you manage to do it ? "

"During my convalescence," replied Quong Ho, with his engaging smile, "I read through the works of the poet with considerable interest. Dr. Rewsby was kind enough to obtain for me the edition in the series of the Oxford Pocket Classics, *P. Virgilii Maronis Opera Omnia. Oxonii. MDCCCCXIII*, from which date I concluded that I was reading the most authoritative text known to English scholarship."

"In the meanwhile," said Marcelle, "Mr. Ho is in need of winter underclothing."

Not the least noteworthy of the day's incidents was the meeting between Quong Ho and Lady Edna, who, proceeding on foot to a War Committee in Grosvenor Street, and wearing the blue serge coat and skirt of serious affairs, ran into them as they waited for a taxi on the Bond Street kerb. She stopped, with outstretched hand.

"Why, Godfrey, I didn't know you were in town to-day."

Then, suddenly catching Marcelle's curious glance, she became conscious of his companions and her cheek flushed. He hastened to explain.

"We're on outfit duty—indenting for clothing for Mr. Ho, who was badly bombed, if you remember, with my father."

He performed the introductions.

"I have heard about you, Mr. Ho," she said graciously. "You're a great mathematician."

Godfrey wondered at her royal memory. Quong Ho, bareheaded, said :

"I but follow painfully in the footsteps of my illustrious master."

She laughed. "You must let Mr. Godfrey bring you round to see me one of these days."

"Madam," replied Quong Ho, with a low bow.

"As the Italians say, it will be a thousand years until I have the honour to avail myself of so precious a privilege."

"We must fix something up soon, then—one day next week."

She shook hands with Marcelle, nodded to the others, and went away wreathed in smiles. Quong Ho followed her with his eyes; then to Godfrey:

"I have never seen a more beauteous and worshipful lady. One might say she was one of the goddesses so vividly described by Publius Virgilius Maro."

"Your taste seems to be impeccable, sir," replied Godfrey.

In the train, on the homeward journey, Marcelle, who was sitting by Godfrey's side—Quong Ho sat opposite reading an evening paper—said to him:

"You seem to be great friends with Lady Edna Donnithorpe."

"The best," said he.

"Do you usually let her know when you're coming up to town?"

Godfrey reflected for the fraction of a second. Lady Edna had certainly committed the unprecedented act of giving herself away. Frankness was therefore the best policy.

"Sometimes I do," he replied innocently. "On the off-chance of her being able to give me a cup of tea. It's only once in a blue moon that she can, for she's always all over the place."

"She's a very beautiful woman, my dear."

"Your taste is as perfect as Quong Ho's."

Quong Ho, hearing his name, looked with inquiring politeness over the top of his newspaper.

"Miss Baring and I were talking of Lady Edna."

"Ah!" said Quong Ho, with a very large smile.

Before they parted, on reaching Churton Towers, Marcelle put her hand on Godfrey's shoulder.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked you that question in the train—I had no right——"

He interrupted her with his boyish laugh.

"You dear old thing! You have every right to cross-question me on my wicked doings. Haven't I adopted you as a sort of young mother? Iolanthe. Or the Paphian one which Quong Ho was gassing about. Now, look here. You just come to me in a rosy cloud whenever you like, and I'll tell you everything."

"Swear it?"

"I swear it."

He kissed her finger-tips, and she went away half reassured. But she was sufficiently in the confidence of the Baltazars, father and son, to know that, for both of them, Lady Edna Donnithorpe was but a recent acquaintance. And to her the boy was "Godfrey," and his presence in London without her knowledge a matter of surprise.

A few days later came the order for Godfrey to be transferred to an orthopædic hospital, where he should learn the new art of walking with an artificial foot. He parted from her with reiterated vows of undying affection. From his Iolanthe mother the secrets of his heart would never be hidden. If she wanted a real good time, she would chuck the nursing—Heaven knew she had done her bit in the war—and come and be a real mother and keep house for him. She smiled through her tears. "Preposterous child!" she called him.

"You seem to forget," said he, "that you're the only female thing associated with my family I've ever cared a hang about. I've adopted you, and don't

you forget it. When I've got my foot, I'll march in like a regimental sergeant-major and take you by the scruff of your Sister's cap, and off you come."

She laughed, trying to attune herself to his gay spirits ; but when she lost the last faint sound on the gravel-path of the motor-cab that took him away, she went up to her room and cried foolishly, as she had not cried for years.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON Godfrey's transference from Godalming, Baltazar, with characteristic suddenness, moved into a furnished house in London. The reasons for his sojourn at the inn existed no longer. Besides, books and other belongings were quickly usurping the cubic space at his disposal. Marcelle, urgently invited to a consultation, advised, according to her practical mind, a flat or a small house which he could furnish for himself; and she offered such aid as her duties would allow. He ruled out her suggestion. There must be rooms for Godfrey and Quong Ho whenever they should be in town; rooms for servants; decent living-rooms, so that the inhabitants should not have to herd higgledy-piggledy together; also ample accommodation for Marcelle, should she care to change her mind. Nothing but a large house would suit him. As for waiting until painters, decorators, paper-hangers, curtain-makers, carpet-layers, electric-light fitters and such-like war-attenuated tribes had completed their business, it was out of the question. It would take months. He wanted to establish himself in a ready-made home right now, and get on with the war. Such a home his friend Mrs. Jackman had suggested. The owner, poor fellow, killed in the war; the wife and a boy of thirteen left ill-provided for. As she could not afford to live in the house, and yet shrank from selling it and

its precious contents, the boy's heritage, she would be content to let it furnished for an indefinite period. There it was—Sussex Gardens—near the Park—admirable in every way. He was accustomed to spacious habitations. His house in Chen Chow covered nearly an acre. In his exile at Spendale Farm he had room to breathe. The Godalming inn was charming in its way, but now and then he had mad impulses to attack the walls of his sitting-room with his nails and tear them down. What was wrong with Sussex Gardens?

"It's extravagant, trouble-shirking, and generally man-like."

"Marry me," said he, "and you shall have a house economical, trouble-inviting and generally woman-like. Any kind of old house you consider ideal."

"You'll want four or five servants to run it," she objected, ignoring his proposition. "Where are you going to get them from in these war-times?"

"They're already there. A cook who'll act as housekeeper——"

"You'll be robbed right and left."

"Come and save me," said Baltazar.

She laughed. "I'm tempted to do so, just out of pity for you."

"Pity won't do, my dear," said he.

"Then you must go your own way."

"I'm going it," said Baltazar. "Perhaps you'll come to Sussex Gardens now and then to see Godfrey. Possibly Quong Ho?"

"I might even come to see John Baltazar," said Marcelle.

So Baltazar settled down in the big house and gave himself up to the infinite interests of war-racked

London. The weeks and the months passed. Quong Ho at Cambridge, under the benign tutelage of Dr. Sheepshanks, began the study of Greek for his Little Go, and wrote to his patron curious impressions of the University. "I have the option," said he, "of taking up for this examination either an infant's primer on Logic compiled by an illustrious thinker of a bygone age, called Jevons, or a humorous work on the Evidences of Christianity by the divine Paley, who seems to have been one of the patriarchs of the Anglican Church. As the latter seems the more entertaining, seeing that it tends to destroy in the mind of the reasoning believer all faith in the historical truth of the Christian religion, I am studying it with a deep interest based on the analogy between English and Chinese academic conservatism. On the other hand, dear sir and most venerated master, if you could suggest a course in Theology more in consonance with modern philosophical thought, I should derive from it much instruction and recreation." Baltazar bade him get on with his Greek, so that if he wanted light reading, he could soothe his leisure hours with Aristotle and Thucydides. "I am working at Greek, like stags," wrote Quong Ho later; "with all the more zeal because I find I have completed already the mathematical course required for my Tripos." Some time afterwards he wrote again: "If you, most honoured sir, would permit me, I should esteem it a privilege to read for the Science Tripos as well as the Mathematical. I should enjoy the possibility of the application of my sound mathematical equipment to the higher branches of physics." "Do what you like, my dear fellow," replied Baltazar. "Suck the old place dry." Quong Ho delighted him. Sheepshanks wrote enthusiastically of the rare

bird. "He will be a monument," said he, "to your sound and masterly teaching. I wish you would come back to us." But Baltazar had other things to do. Having set his house in order, established Quong Ho at Cambridge, seen Godfrey accept his filial position and cemented relations, such as they were, with Marcelle, he plunged head foremost into the war. Others floundered about in it, tired after strenuous years of buffeting. He came to it fresh, with new zeal and unimpaired strength of mind and body. With a new, keen judgment too, being in the unique position of one with historical perspective. Others had lived through the fateful years and could not clear their brains of the myriad cross-currents that had swirled through them day by day, almost hour by hour, and had systematized themselves into their mental being, so that, with all their passionate patriotism, they could not see the main course. Baltazar brought an untroubled and vigorous intellect to bear on an accurately studied situation.

"We're all at sixes and sevens," cried Weatherley one day in despair, when they were discussing the new weekly review, the Far Eastern policy of which he had asked Baltazar to control. "Unless we're careful, the project will drop to pieces. Russell now declines to edit it unless we give him an autocratic hand. But Russell's mad on Slovenes and Ruthenes and Croats. Clever as he is, he has no sense of proportion. I don't know what the devil we're going to do. There's no one else can give the time. For the review to be any good, a man must throw his whole soul into it."

Baltazar had one of his flashes. "If you like, I'll edit the damned thing. You've all been fiddling about for a title. I've got one. 'The New Universe.'

I'll undertake to make a living thing of it, wipe out all the dreary, weary old weekly and monthly respectabilities. We won't have a second-rater writing for it. We'll appeal to 'Longleat's towers' and 'Mendip's sunless caves.' We'll make it the one thing that matters in this quill-driven country. We'll have it translated into all known languages and circulate it over the civilized earth. It'll be the only publication that'll give everybody the truth about everything."

He went on in his vehement way. When Weatherley asked him where the money for so gigantic a scheme was to come from, he quoted the Tichborne claimant.

"Some has money and no brains and some has brains and no money. If those with no money can't get money from those with no brains, God help them."

And it came to pass, a few days afterwards, at a meeting of the committee of the new review, that Baltazar had his way. As he looked with even vision on Ruthenes, Slovenes, Belgians, Hereros, Jugo-Slavs, British miners, Samoans, the staff of the Foreign Office, Indian princes, Mrs. Annie Besant, the denizens of Arkansas, the Southern Chinese, the gilded adorners of Newport, the Women's Emergency League, the Wilhelmstrasse, Armenians, and the Young Men's Christian Association, a fact elicited by lengthy discussion of the multitudinous phases of world politics, and as he succeeded in convincing all the several zealots of particular interests, that their impassioned aims were an integral part of his far-reaching scheme, they came unanimously to the conclusion that no one but he had the universality to edit *The New Universe*, and passed a resolution promising him their loyal co-operation.

"I'm going to make this darned thing hum," said Baltazar to Weatherley.

Money was the first object. Brains he could command in plenty. He envisaged London as his El Dorado. The history of his exploitation of the capitalist and landowner would, if it were published, become a text-book on the science and remain for ever a classic. He forced wealth-guarding doors of whose existence he had been ignorant six months before; by a stroke of the genius which had brought him his position in China, he secured the support, financial and moral, without the control, of an important group of newspapers; he enlisted the aid of every possible unit in his rapidly increasing circle of acquaintance. The scope of the Weekly had extended far beyond the modest bounds of its conception. Originally it was to be an appeal to the thinkers of all nations. "Damn thinkers," said Baltazar. "They're as scarce as angels and about as useful. We want to put thoughts into the heads of those that don't think. It's the Doers we want to get hold of. A thing academic is a thing dead. This is going to live." Some of the superior smiled at his enthusiasm; but Baltazar damned them and went his way. This was going to be the Great Teaching Crusade of the War, the most far-sweeping instrument of propaganda known to journalism. He pulled all strings, brought in all parties. A high dignitary of the Labour World and a Tory Duke of unimpeachable integrity found themselves appointed as Trustees of The New Universe Publication Fund. Money flowed in.

One day he ran across Pillivant, in St. James's Street, Pillivant mainly individualized by a sable fur coat and a lustrous silk hat and a monstrous cigar cutting his red face like a fifteen-inch gun cutting the

deck of a battleship. Baltazar greeted him as a long-lost brother and haled him off to lunch at his club. Mellowed by the club's famous Chambertin and 1870 port, he took a rosy view of all kinds of worlds, including *The New Universe*, as presented by his host. It was a great scheme, he agreed. He was sick of all newspapers, no matter of what shades of opinion. They were all the same. Honesty was not in them. Nor was there honesty in any Government. Men with not a quarter of what he had done for the country to their credit, were being rewarded with peerages and baronetcies. In the New Year's Honours List he had not been mentioned. Not even offered a beastly knighthood. But it didn't matter. He was a patriot. And it was very fine old brandy, and he didn't mind if he did have another glass. Still, if a man put down a thousand pounds for a thing, it was only business prudence to know where he stood.

"You'll stand here," cried Baltazar, spreading before his eyes a printed list of the General Committee, a galaxy of dazzling names. "You'll take rank in the forefront of the biggest patriotic crusade that ever was. Your light will no longer be under a bushel. It will shine before men. What's the good of your name being lost in a close-printed subscription list? This is a totally different thing. Your appearance here will give you position. Look at the people. Have you ever stood in with a crowd like this before?"

Baltazar held the mellowed profiteer with his compelling eyes.

"I can't say that I have," replied Pillivant. "But all the same——"

"But all the same," Baltazar interrupted, "you've been at loggerheads with the War Office. There was that question asked in the House over the Aerodrome

contract. You told me about it yourself. Now listen to me carefully"—Baltazar played a gambler's card—"your coming in with us will be a guarantee of integrity. It's obvious that no one on this list could do otherwise than run straight. The worry it would save you!" He looked at his watch and jumped up. "By George! I've got an appointment with our Treasurer, Lord Beldon. Would you like to come along and hear more about the scheme? Waiter! Ask them to get me a taxi. We'll find our hats and coats round here."

He drove a gratified Pillivant to Chesterfield Gardens and introduced him to Lord Beldon (with whom he had no appointment whatever) as an enthusiastic believer in *The New Universe*, ready to finance it to the extent of two or three thousand pounds. "Three thousand, wasn't it?"

"I said between two and three thousand," replied Pillivant, flattered at his reception by the powerful old peer, and not daring to fall back on the original one thousand that had been vaguely suggested. A bluff, of course, for which he admired Baltazar, although he cursed him in his heart; but was it worth while calling it? He could buy up this old blighter of a lord twice over. He would show him that he had the money. "I was thinking of two thousand five hundred," he continued. "But what's a miserable five hundred? Yes. You can put me down for three thousand. In fact"—with a flourish he drew a cheque-book from his pocket—"I'll write you the cheque now. Payable, I presume, to the Right Honourable the Earl of Beldon."

"Or *The New Universe*. As you please."

"Better be personal," said Pillivant, enjoying the inscription of the rolling title and the prospect of the

elevated eyebrows of the bank clerk who should debit the sum to his account.

"That's exceedingly generous of you, Mr. Pillivant," said Lord Beldon, putting the cheque into a drawer of his writing-table.

"Just patriotic, your lordship," replied Pillivant, with a profiteering wave of the hand.

"I think," said Baltazar, "that the contributor of such an important sum ought to be offered some practical interest in the scheme. Mr. Pillivant's name will appear on the General Committee. But that's more or less honorary. The sub-committees will do the real business. We're going to deal with every phase of the war, Pillivant, and the various sub-committees—their names will be published large as life and twice as natural—will supply the editorial department with indisputable facts. Now," he turned to Lord Beldon, "if Mr. Pillivant will serve on the Purity of Contracts Sub-Committee, he'll be bringing us a tremendous and invaluable business experience."

"That's a most happy suggestion," smiled Lord Beldon.

"I think so, too. I'll get a run for my money," said Pillivant.

When he had gone, Lord Beldon turned a puzzled brow on Baltazar.

"Isn't that the chap about whom some nasty things were said a few months ago?"

Baltazar grinned. "It is," said he. "We've made him disgorge some of his ill-gotten gains, and, by putting him on the sub-committee, we'll make him pretty careful about getting them ill in the future."

Thus, with ruthless pertinacity he gathered in a great sum of money, and finally in a splendour of publicity the first number of *The New Universe*

appeared, and from the first day of its appearance Baltazar felt himself to be a power in the land.

Another reputation in certain circles had meanwhile been made by his trenchant article on Chinese affairs in the *Imperial Review*. It led to an interview with the Chinese Ambassador, who professed agreeable astonishment at finding the famous but somewhat mysterious Anglo-Chinaman of Chen Chow and the writer of the article one and the same person. After which he spent many pleasant hours at the Embassy, discussing Chinese art and philosophy and the prospects of the career of his prodigious pupil, Quong Ho. In course of time, the Foreign Office discreetly beckoned to him. It had heard from authoritative sources—it smiled—that Mr. Baltazar's knowledge of China was unique, for though many other men were intimately acquainted with the country from the point of view of the official, the missionary, the merchant and the traveller, it had never heard of a man of his attainments who had divorced himself from all European influence and had attained a high position in the social and political life of non-cosmopolitan China. If Mr. Baltazar would from time to time put his esoteric knowledge at the service of the Foreign Office, the Foreign Office would be grateful. At last, after various interviews with various high personages, for all this was not conveyed to him in a quarter of an hour, it not being the way of the Foreign Office to fall on a stranger's neck and open its heart to him, he received a proposal practically identical with Weatherley's suggestion which he had so furiously flouted. The Secret Service —the Intelligence Department—had been crying out for years for a man like him, who should go among the Chinese as a Chinaman, thoroughly in

their confidence. "A spy?" asked Baltazar bluntly. The Foreign Office smiled a bland smile and held out deprecating fingers. Of course not. An agent, acting for the Allies, counteracting German influence, working in his own way, responsible to no one but the Powers at Whitehall, but yet, with necessary secrecy, towards China's longed-for Declaration of War against Germany.

"China will come in on our side before the year's out," said Baltazar.

How did he know it? Why, it was obvious to any student of the science of political forces. It was as supererogatory for a man to go out to China to persuade her to join the Allies as to stir up a bomb whose fuse was alight, in order to make it explode. The Foreign Office protested against argument by analogy. The forthcoming entry of China into the war was naturally not hidden from its omniscience. But that did not lessen the vital need of secret and skilful propaganda before, during and after the period that China might be at war. There were the eternal German ramifications to be watched; the possible Japanese influences—it spoke under the seal of the most absolute confidence—which, without any thought of disloyalty on the part of Japan, might not accord with Western interests; there were also the bewildering cross-currents of internal Chinese politics. There were thousands of phases of invaluable information which could not be viewed by the Embassy; thousands of strings to be pulled which could not be pulled from Pekin. "We could not, like Germany and Austria in America, outrage those international principles upon which the ambassadorial system had been based for centuries. At the same time——"

"You're not above using a spy," said Baltazar.

Again the Foreign Office deprecated the suggestion. It wouldn't dream of asking Mr. Baltazar to take such a position.

"Then," said Baltazar, "what are you driving at?"

The Foreign Office looked at him rather puzzled. As a matter of fact, it did not quite know. Having Baltazar's *dossier* pretty completely before it, it had gradually been compelled to the recognition of Baltazar as a man of supreme importance in Chinese affairs. He must be used somehow, but on the way to use him it was characteristically vague and hesitating. It knew a lot about the Ming Dynasty being a connoisseur in porcelain—but the Ming Dynasty, and all that it connoted, had come to an end a devil of a long time ago; which was a pity, for it only knew the little about Modern China which it gleaned from the epigrammatic and uninspired *précis* of official reports. To attach Baltazar in any way to the Embassy was out of the question. The idea would have sent a shiver down its spine to the very last vertebra of the most ancient messenger whose father had run on devious errands for Lord Palmerston. On the other hand, Baltazar was not of the type which could be sent out on a secret errand. That fact he had made almost brutally obvious. So, after looking at him for a puzzled second or two, it smiled invitingly. Really, it waited for him to make a proposition.

This he did.

"Offer me a square and above-board mission as the duly accredited agent of the British Government—to perform whatever duties you prescribe for me, and I'll consider it. At any rate, I'll regard the offer as an honour. But to go back to my friends as——"

"Ah!" interrupted the Foreign Office, turning

over a page or two of typescript. "That's interesting. We wanted to ask you. How did you get your Chinese name? You started there, after your abandonment of your brilliant Cambridge career—you see we know all about you, Mr. Baltazar—as James Burden."

"Phonetic," said Baltazar impatiently. "It's as impossible for an ordinary Chinaman to say James Burden, as for you to pronounce a word with the Zulu click in it. It's the nearest they could get. It's good Chinese. So I adopted it. I'm known by it all through Southern China. Let me get on with what I was saying. To go back to my friends and pretend I was acting in their interests, while all the time I was acting in the interests of the British Government—well, I'm damned if I would entertain the idea for a second."

The Foreign Office winced at the oath, although it damned lustily in private.

"But if you go back, as you say, accredited——?"

"That's a different matter altogether."

"There's still the question of—of remuneration," said the Foreign Office.

"I'm by way of being a rich man," said Baltazar. "I didn't spend the eighteen golden years of my life in the interior of China for my health."

The Foreign Office beamed. "That simplifies things enormously."

"It generally does," replied Baltazar.

A month later the Foreign Office made him the offer which his sense of personal dignity demanded from them; and, honour being satisfied, he declined it. He could do better work for his country in London, said he, than in again burying himself alive for an indefinite number of years in China. The Foreign

Office regretted his decision; but it gave him to understand that the offer would always remain open. They parted on terms of the most cordial politeness; but if the Foreign Office had heard the things Baltazar said of it, its upstanding hair would have raised its own roof off.

"Three months," he cried to Marcelle, "playing the fool, wasting their time and mine, when the whole thing could have been done in five minutes."

"But I can't quite see," she objected, "why you went on when you had made up your mind from the start not to go back to China."

"Can't you?" said he. "I'll explain. I've sworn that there'll be no more idiocy on the part of John Baltazar to prevent him coming into his own. He is coming into it. That the F. O. should recognize his position was an essential factor of his own. When a man can dictate terms, he has established himself. See? I suppose," said he, halting in his abrupt way, and thrusting his hands deep in his trousers pockets, "you think this is just childish vanity. Come, say it."

She met his bright eyes and smiled up at him. "If I do, you won't bite my head off?"

"No. I'll convince you that it isn't. Vanity, as its name implies, is emptiness. Negative. This isn't vanity, it's Pride. Something positive. My pet Deadly Sin. If you've got that strong, you can tell the six others to go back to hell. If I hadn't got it, the others would have torn me to bits long ago. If I were a mongrel and thought myself a prize bull-pup—that would be vanity. But I know, hang it all, that I'm a prize bull-pup, and when I take leave to remind myself, and people like the F. O., of the fact, that's Pride. And when I say I've sworn to fulfil

the Destiny of the prize pup, John Baltazar, and be one of the intellectual forces that'll carry the Empire along to Victory—that's not vanity. Where's the emptiness? It's Pride—reckoned first of the Seven Deadly Sins. If I glory in it—well—according to the Theologians, it's my damnation: according to me, it's the other way about. Look. There's another way of putting it——"

Suddenly she was smitten with the memory of Godfrey's words five or six months ago, when he fumed at the bear-leading of Quong Ho—"Those infernal dancing eyes of his—and behind them something so pathetic and appealing." The boy was right. She met just that pathetic appeal. He was so anxious to put himself right with her. He went on:

"If I was in the habit of vowing to perform impossible extravagances, that would be the sign of a vain man. But—apart from the Acts of God—and I suppose technically we must classify the wiping out of my life's work under that heading—I have carried out every wild-cat scheme I've deliberately set my mind to. So when I say I'm coming into John Baltazar's own, I know what I'm talking about, and that's the sign of a proud man. And, my dear," said he after a pause, occupied in filling and lighting his pipe, "I think this jolly old sin of mine keeps me from making an ass of myself in all sorts of other ways."

Swiftly she applied these last words to the relations between them and confessed their truth. A vain man would have pestered the life out of her, confident in attaining his ends—ends as beautiful and spiritual as you please—until through sheer weariness she yielded. Such a one would enunciate and firmly believe in the proposition—she had not spent twenty

years among men in angelic ignorance of their idiosyncrasies—that just hammer, hammer hard enough, and a woman will be bound to love you in the end. But there were others, with a deadly, sinful pride like Baltazar, who, scorning the vain, maintained the dignified attitude of the late lamented King Canute. He would not claim the impossible.

But this was a far cry from the Imperial Government Mission to the Far East. She asked, by way of escape from personal argument :

" After all, this Chinese proposition is a first-rate thing. Is it so very repugnant to you to go back ? "

He stood over her with his clenched fists in the air.

" My dear," said he, " you talked last year some silly rot about a locust. I know the beast better than you do. It ate all those precious years I spent in that infernal country. The best years of my life. I'm starting now at fifty-one where I ought to have started at thirty. That rotten Chinese locust has robbed me of everything. You, Godfrey, the vital life of England, and a brilliant career with Heaven knows what kind of power for good. I hold the country in the most deadly detestation. Nothing in this wide world would induce me to go back—not even if they wanted to make me Emperor. I've finished with it for ever and ever. I swear it."

" You needn't look as if I were urging you to it," she laughed. " I'm sure I don't want to lose you."

" All right then," said Baltazar. " Let us talk of something else."

In these early months of struggle to enter his kingdom, Baltazar came nearer happiness than he had ever done before. A man younger, or more habitually dependent on women, would have counted the one

thing wanting as the one prime essential and would have regarded everything else as naught. But Baltazar, although wistfully recognizing the one missing element, was far too full of the lust of others to sit down and make moan. Marcelle gave him all she could, a devoted friendship, a tender intimacy, a sympathetic understanding. He wanted infinitely more, his man's nature clamoured for the whole of her. But what she gave was of enormous comfort. It was a question of taking it or leaving it. Perhaps had his love been less, he would have left it. Love me all in all or not at all, and be hanged to you ! That might have been his attitude. Besides, he knew that by the high-handed proceeding of the primitive man he could at any moment carry her off to the cave in Sussex Gardens. In a way, it was his own choice to live celibate. Sooner accept the graciousness she could give freely than take by force what she would yield grudgingly. Let him be happy with what he had.

For he had much.

Godfrey, learning to walk on his artificial foot, a miracle of cunning contrivance, and allowed, as it seemed, almost indefinite leave until he should reach perfection of movement, took up his quarters in his house, at first almost angrily, compelled against his will by the infernal dancing eyes and the pathetic appeal behind them, and after a short while very contentedly, appreciating his strange father's almost womanly solicitude for his comfort, his facilities for leading his own young man's life. Far more attractive the well-appointed house, with a snuggery of his own made over for him to have and to hold in perpetuity, with a table always spread for any friends he cared to ask to lunch or dine, with an alert intellect for

companion ever ready to give of its best, with opportunities of meeting the odd, fascinating personalities whom the editor of *The New Universe* had gathered round him, with an atmosphere of home all the more pleasant because of its unfamiliarity, than the bleak room at an over-crowded hotel, or the cramped Half Moon Street lodgings which in his boyish experience were the inevitable condition of a lonely young man's existence in London. Once he said :

" I know it's a delicate point, sir, but I should be awfully glad if you'd let me contribute—pay my way, you know. It's really embarrassing for me to accept all this—I can't explain—it's horrid. But I do wish you would let me, sir."

This was just after breakfast one morning. Baltazar paused in the act of filling his pipe.

" If you like, my boy," said he, " we can discuss the matter with our housekeeper, Mrs. Simmons, and agree upon a weekly sum for your board and lodging. I know that you have independent means and can pay anything in reason. Rather than not have you here, I should agree to such an arrangement."

" It would make me feel easier in my mind, sir," said Godfrey. " Shall we have her in now and get the thing over ? "

" Not yet," said Baltazar. " There's another side of the question. By accepting your father's house as your natural home, you are giving a very human, though faulty being, the very greatest happiness he has ever known in his life. By refusing, you would destroy something that there is no power in the wide world to replace. I don't deserve any gratitude for being your father ; but, after all, you're my son—and I'm very proud of it. And all I have, not only in my house but in my heart, is yours." He lit a

match. "Just yours," said he, and the breath of the words blew the match out.

When Godfrey next met Marcelle, he told her of this.

"What the devil could a fellow do," said he, "but feel a worm and grovel?"

Another thing that added greatly to Baltazar's happiness was Godfrey's attitude towards Quong Ho during the vacations, when the young Chinaman was also a member of the household.

"I like the beggar," said Godfrey. "He's so tactful; always on tap when one wants him, and never in the way when one doesn't. And his learning would sink a ship."

Quong Ho, for his part, sat at the feet of the young English officer and with pathetic earnestness studied him as a model of English vernacular and deportment, and at the same time sucked in from him the whole theory of the art of modern warfare. He had a genius for assimilating knowledge. With the amused aid of Lady Edna Donnithorpe and Burke, he acquired prodigious familiarity with the inter-relationships of the great English families. At Baltazar's dinner-table he absorbed modern political thought like a sponge. It was during the Easter vacation that he more especially determined to assume the perfect Englishman. Dr. Sheepshanks, towards the end of term, had made him an astonishing proposition. A mathematician of his calibre, said he, would be wasted in China. Why should Mr. Ho not contemplate, as Fellow and Professor, identification of himself with Cambridge? The war had swept away all possible contemporary rivals. It was in his power to attain in a few years not only a brilliant position in the University, but in the European world of pure science. Sheepshanks had

also written in the same strain to Baltazar. And when Quong Ho modestly sought his master's advice, Baltazar vehemently supported Sheepshanks.

"Of course you'll stay. Weren't those my very words at the hospital at Water-End? Another time perhaps you'll believe me."

"For many years have I been convinced of the infallibility of your judgment," said Quong Ho. "I shall also never forget," he added, "that I am merely the clay which you have moulded."

"I'm beginning to think," cried Baltazar, "that I'm not your friend Dr. Rewsby's colossal ass after all."

Baltazar was happy. He went about shouldering his way through the amazing war-world, secure in his grip on all that mattered to him in life. His was a name that, once heard, stuck in men's memory. Gradually it became vaguely familiar to the general public, well known to an expanding circle. His romantic story, at first to his furious indignation, was paragraphed far and wide. The Athenæum, under special rule, reinstated him in his membership. The intransigent policy of *The New Universe* brought him into personal contact with the High and Mighty at the heads of Ministries. Invitations to speak by all manners of organizations poured in. As a speaker his dominating personality found its supreme expression. He exalted in his newly found strength. The essential man of action had been trammelled for half a century by the robe of the scholar. The Zeppelin bomb had set him naked.

Said Pillivant, meeting him in the offices of *The New Universe*: "A year or so ago you didn't know there was a war on. I took you for the ruddiest freak I had ever come across. Now you've blossomed out into a ruddy swell bossing everything. I can't

open a newspaper without seeing your name. How have you managed to do it ? "

" Profiteering," said Baltazar.

" Profiteering ? " asked Pillivant, puckering up his fat face in perplexity. " What's your line ? "

" Brains," said Baltazar.

He turned away delighted. Well, it came to that. There was no arrogance about it.

He was giving everything in his power to the country. Oppressed, at one time, by the sense of physical fitness, and fired by the sudden, urgent demand for man-power, he had, in one of his Gordian-knot cutting moods, marched into a recruiting office and vaunted his brawn and muscle. " I'm fifty," said he, " but I defy anybody to say I'm not physically equal to any boy of twenty-five." But they had politely laughed at him and sent him away raging furiously. It was then that he followed the despised counsel of the unimaginative Burtingshaw, K.C., and joined the Special Constabulary and the National Volunteers.

" What's the next thing you're going to take on ? " asked Marcelle.

" First, my dear," said he, " the whole running of this war. Then the administration of the Kingdom of God on Earth."

" What a boy you are ! " she laughed.

" A damned fine boy," said Baltazar.

One fine Sunday in May she came up to town to lunch with him alone, Godfrey being away somewhere or other for the week-end.

" My dear," he cried excitedly, as soon as she arrived, " I've been dying to see you. It's going to happen."

" What ? "

She smiled into his eager face. There was nothing so extravagant that it could not happen to Baltazar.

"There's talk of a new Ministry—a Ministry of Propaganda."

"Well?"

"Can't you guess?"

Her eyes glistened suddenly.

"You—Minister?"

He nodded. "It's all in the clouds at present. At least these whifflers of Cloud-Cuckoo-City think it is. But I don't. They don't see the Star of John Baltazar in the ascendant. I do. My dear, there's not an adverse influence in all the bag of planetary tricks!"

If he could have seen and appreciated what was happening some forty miles off, he might have observed in a certain conjunction of planets, to wit, Venus and Mars, something that would have modified his optimistic prognostication.

CHAPTER XIX

THERE they were in a punt on one of the silent reaches of the Thames above Moulsford; Venus in white serge, with a blue veil around hat and throat, reclining gracefully on the cushions, and Mars in white flannels standing, punt-pole in hand. It was one of those days when Spring, in exuberant mood, throws off her shyness and masquerades in the gorgeousness of Summer. The noontide vapours quivered over the sun-baked meadows beyond the tow-path, and the shadows beneath the willows on the opposite bank loomed black and cool. The punt was proceeding up a patch of blazing river, and the drops from the pole sparkled like diamonds. Just ahead there was a bend lapped in the violent shade of overhanging elms.

"This is the nearest thing to Heaven," said Lady Edna.

"Wait till we tie up under the trees and it'll be Heaven itself," said Godfrey.

Even in the boating times of peace this stretch was rarely frequented, being too far both for the London crowd whose general limit was Goring, and for the Oxford town excursionist who seldom pushed below Wallingford. Also the *cognoscenti* declared it an uninteresting bit of river, dull and flat, devoid of the unspeakable charm of Cliveden and Pangbourne, and therefore unworthy of especial consideration. Still, the River is the River. Talk to an Englishman of

the River, and he will not think of the Severn or the Wye, or the historic highway between London Bridge and the sea, but of those few miles of England's fairy-stream, the beloved haunts of beauty and gentleness and love and laughter, where all the cares of the world are soothed into dreamful ease and the vague passions and aspirations of youth are transformed into magical definition. To the Londoner, at any rate, it is as sacred as Westminster Abbey. So the stretches of loveliness pronounced dull by the superior, were never neglected, and even this remote section, on Sundays especially, had its sparse devotees. But now, in war-time, not a blade of oar or paddle, not a glistening punt-pole disturbed the sweet stillness of the waters. Only once, since they had left the boat-house, had a barge passed them ; a barge gay as to its poop with yellow and red, a thin spiral of smoke from its cabin funnel proclaiming the cooking of the Sunday dinner, while the barge-folk lounged on deck, their eyes and attitudes suggestive of those who were already overfed on lotus, and one small, freckled sun-wraith of a child flitted along the tow-path beside the mild old horse.

But half an hour had passed since then. The very meadows no longer showed the once familiar pairs of Sunday lovers. Were it not for the pleasant cows, it would have been a scene of lovely desolation.

"There," said Godfrey, shipping the pole, and guiding the punt by the aid of the branches to a moor-ing, "allow me to introduce you to Heaven."

She kissed her hand to the greenery and the dark water and laughed lightly.

"How d'ye do, Heaven ?"

Godfrey turned from the rope which he had made fast and stumbled to the floor of the punt. She started up in alarm.

"Your foot, dear!"

He laughed. "It's all right this time. Sometimes I forget it's a fake."

He sat beside her on the cushions and pointed to a basket in front of them. "Shall we start on the nectar and ambrosia, or is it too early?"

"Let us wait a bit and take in Heaven first. What on earth are you doing?" she asked, a moment afterwards, as he established himself elbows on knees and chin in hands, and stared close into her blue eyes.

"I'm taking in all the Heaven that matters to me," said Godfrey.

"Do I matter so much?"

"You do."

"Light me a cigarette," said Lady Edna.

He obeyed, handed her one alight and she put it between her lips.

"I love doing that," said he. "I've never done it for any other woman in my life."

She arched her eyebrows. "Does his Sultanship think he's conferring an unprecedented honour on a poor woman?"

"Oh, Edna!" His boyish face flushed suddenly. "You know what I mean. I never dreamed that a wonderful woman would ever dream of taking anything from my lips to hers. Look." He lit another cigarette and held it out to her. "Let me have yours."

"Baby!" she said, making the exchange.

All of which imbecility was very bad and sad and mad, but to the united youth in the punt it was peculiarly agreeable.

"What a difference from last week-end," she said contentedly, after a while.

"What happened then?"

"I had all the stuff-boxes in London down, Edgar included."

"And my venerable sire. I remember. I was at the War Office all Sunday. And it poured with rain. What did you do with them?"

"I stroked them and fed them and put them through their little tricks," she laughed. Then she added more seriously: "It happened to be a very important day for your father. The Government has gone crazy on finding out new forceful men—and clearing out the incompetent political hacks. Edgar's just hanging on by the skin of his teeth, you know. Well, they've discovered your remarkable father, and last week-end they practically fixed it up with him. A new Ministry of Propaganda. Oh!" she laughed again. "I didn't have such a bad time after all. But"—she sighed—"this is better. Don't let us think of wars or politics or Edgars and such horrible things." She threw her cigarette into the water, and bent down to the basket. "Let us lunch."

It had been indeed an important day for Baltazar. The house near Moulsford, Lady Edna's personal possession, a vast square, red-brick, late Georgian building, standing in grounds that reached down to the river, had been filled with anxiously chosen High-and-Mightinesses, among whom her husband, minister though he was, shone like an inferior satellite. It was the last move in the game on behalf of John Baltazar which she had played for many weeks.

"What are you asking that fellow for?" Edgar Donnithorpe had asked, looking at the list of guests.

"Because he amuses me."

"He doesn't amuse me," snapped her husband.

He was a little thin man, with thin grey hair and a thin moustache and a thin voice. Up to a few months

ago she had treated him with contemptuous tolerance. Now she had begun to dislike him exceedingly.

"If you don't want to meet Mr. Baltazar," she replied, "you can stay in London."

They sparred in the unedifying manner of ill-assorted husband and wife.

"I'm sick of seeing this overbearing adventurer in my house," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. I'm not going to let you make a fool of yourself."

"My dear man," she replied cuttingly, "if I were looking out for a lover, this time I should take a young one."

She laughed scornfully and swept away. Long smouldering resentment had been suddenly fanned into the flame of open hostility. She raged in her heart against him. Never before had he dared to insinuate such a taint in her political interest in any man. She, Lady Edna Donnithorpe, to carry on an intrigue with John Baltazar—the insult of it!

The next day brought a short but fierce encounter.

"You pretend to be jealous. You're not. You're envious. You're envious of a bigger man than yourself. You're afraid of him. You little minnows hate Tritons. I quite understand."

In the wrath of a weak and foolish man he sputtered unforgettable words which no woman ever forgives. She faced him with lips as thin as his own, and her languorous eyes hardened into little dots of jade.

"You had better see to it that I don't break you," she said.

"Break me? How? Politically?" He laughed a thin laugh of derision. "In the first place, you

couldn't. In the second, you wouldn't. What would become of your position if I were out of the Government?"

"I can very well look after myself," she replied.

On Saturday morning he made some apology for loss of temper which she coldly accepted on condition of his courteous treatment of John Baltazar. And so it fell that, when the subject of all this to-do arrived at Moulsford, he found himself almost effusively welcomed by the negative Edgar, and thrust into the inner circle of the High-and-Mightinesses assembled. As the latter took Baltazar very seriously as a coming power in the country, and as Lady Edna's attitude towards him was marked by no especial characteristic, Edgar Donnithorpe came to the unhappy conclusion that he had made a fool of himself, and during the informal discussion on the creation of the new Ministry, for which purpose the week-end party had gathered together, he had dared do little more than "just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike" when Baltazar's name was mentioned. Which pusillanimity coming to his wife's ears, deepened her resentment against him; and only Baltazar's triumphal exit on the Monday morning restrained her from giving it practical expression. Sufficient for the day was the success thereof.

In the lazy punt, that gracious Spring morning, she strove to drive the last week-end from her thoughts. She revelled in the unusual and the audacious. Edgar had gone to Paris on an international conference. Only an ancient and faded Aunt, Lady Lætitia Vardon, a sort of permanent aristocratic caretaker, was in the house; Godfrey the sole guest. And Aunt Lætitia had caught a God-sent cold and was staying in bed. They two had the whole bright day before them, and the scented evening, with never a soul to obtrude on their idyllic

communion. She had always snapped her fingers at convention. But, Lady Edna Donnithorpe, chartered libertine, had always observed the terms of her charter, her heart never having tempted her to break them. This delicious breach was a different matter altogether. She had even dared to put off two or three previously invited friends. . . .

She told him this while he helped her to chicken and ham. He proclaimed her the most wonderful thing in the world.

"Don't you think I deserve one little day's holiday in the year? Just a holiday from the talk, talk, talk, the smiling, the wheedling, the scheming, with my brain ever on the alert, and seeming to grow bigger and bigger as the night goes on, until it almost bursts my head when I lie down to sleep?"

"Why do you do it?" he asked.

She shrugged her graceful shoulders. "I don't know. I used to love it. Now I'm beginning to hate it. I was at a wedding a day or two ago—Charlie Haughton and Minnie Lavering—you know whom I mean, don't you? They haven't a sixpence between them—and they looked so happy—oh! so damned happy"—her voice broke adorably—"that I nearly wept."

He neglected his plateful of chicken and ham, and bent forward over the basket between them.

"I'd do anything in the wide world to make you happy, Edna."

"I know you would," she smiled. "You're doing your best now. It's an excellent best. But it might be better if you fished out the salt."

While she helped herself daintily from the paper packet which he held out, he laughed, adoring her ever-ready trick of switching off the sentimental current.

"Now you are really just a little bit happy, aren't you?"

She nodded intimately, which emboldened him to say:

"For the life of me I can't see what induced you to take up with a rotten sort of cripple like me."

"Neither can I," she replied composedly. "Except perhaps that the rotten cripple is a very brave and distinguished soldier."

"Rubbish!" said Godfrey. "There are hundreds of thousands like me all over the place, as indistinguishable from one another as peas in a peck."

"Won't you allow poor woman just a nice sense of discrimination?"

"I'll allow the one woman in the universe," said Godfrey, "to have everything she pleases."

"Then that's that," said Lady Edna.

They finished their meal happily, drank hot coffee from a thermos flask and smoked and talked. As on the first day he had sat beside her, so now, under the spell of her keen sympathy, he told her of all his doings. For the past two or three months they had been of absorbing interest. He had besieged the War Office, as he had gloriously threatened, until one day he received an appointment on the staff of the Director-General of Military Operations. That it was due to any other influence than his own furious and persistent attacks, he had not the remotest suspicion. He had dashed away from the amazing interview in a taxi to Lady Edna, whom by good chance he found at home, and vaunted his generalship. His father's blood sang in his veins. The lady to whom, in close conspiracy with Lady Northby, he owed the billet coveted by thousands of men, wounded and whole, welcomed his news with the smiling surprise of a mother who listens

to her offspring's tale of the wondrous gifts of Santa Claus.

It was one of the characteristics of Lady Edna Donnithorpe to love the secret meed of secret services, a far more subtle joy than the facile gratitude poured on a Lady Bountiful. Besides, such a reputation would in itself destroy her power. Many women of her acquaintance who had enjoyed it for a brief season during the war, had seen the scared shoulders of Authority turned frozenly upon them. She was not one of those women acting from thoughtless impulse or vanity. The game of intrigue fascinated her ; she knew her winnings and hoarded them ; but they were the concern of no one in the wide world. Perhaps the time might come when she could say to Godfrey : " All that you are you owe to me. I have made you, and I have made your father. I can show you proofs. What are you going to do ? " Blackmail of a kind, certainly. A woman driven up against a wall is justified in using any weapons of defence. But all this lay hidden in the self-protective instinct. No thought of it marred her triumph.

She listened to his fairy-tales of the Allies' war organization with a twofold pride. First, in this vicarious entrance into the jealously guarded Ark of the Covenant, whereby she gained exact knowledge of mighty happenings to come, denied even to the self-important Edgar. Secondly, in her unerring judgment of men. For Baltazar had told her a week before of his meeting with one of Godfrey's chiefs, who had given the boy unreserved praise. Whereupon she herself had made it her week's business to track the social doings of the great man until she ran him down a day or two ago at a friend's house, and, in reply to her tactful questionings, he had replied :

"Baltazar? Lots of brains. A brilliant fellow, with wonderful power of detail. Son of that astonishing chap John Baltazar, who has just come to life again, and everybody's talking about. Oh, you needn't be afraid. We have spotted him right enough."

She was sufficiently versed in affairs to know that a major-general does not speak of a third-grade staff officer, and at the very tail of the grade at that, in eulogistic terms, even to Lady Edna Donnithorpe, without good reason. She hugged the word "brilliant" to her heart.

And while Godfrey talked that May afternoon, she felt that she was justified in all that she had done, was doing, and was going to do. Yet, though what she had done gave her perfect satisfaction, and what she was doing was blatantly obvious, what she was going to do lay dimly hidden behind a rosy veil. For the moment this handsome, clean-run boy to whom she had given her heart, much to her own amazement, was contented with platonic adoration in a punt. How long, she wondered, would his contentment last? How long, indeed, would her own? Well, well, *Vogue la galère*. Pole the springtide punt. Let her drain to its full the unprecedented glory of the day.

The cares of her crowded, youth-consuming life fell from her, and she became young again, younger than she had been before her loveless marriage. As she responded laughing to his eager, boyish foolishness, she felt that she had never known till then what it was to be young. She felt an infinite craving for all she had missed. . . . And Godfrey, standing there in careless grace, punt-pole in hand, alert, confident, radiant in promise, was the incarnation of it all: of all the youth and laughter and love that she had passed by, scornfully unheeding. She feasted her hungry eyes on him. Not

only was he good to look at, in his physical perfection. He was good to think upon. He had faced death a thousand times, no doubt as debonairly as he faced the current of the mild river. He, that boy whom a whisper could compel to her bidding, had led men through mazes of unimagined blood and slaughter. If he had one worm gnawing at his heart, it was the desire to get back again to this defiant comradeship with death. She had looked up the record of the achievement that had won for him the Military Cross. What a man he was! And as she watched him, there floated across her vision the figure of a thin, dry, self-seeking politician, and she shivered in the sunshine. And, as there chanced to be a pause in the boyish talk, she let her thoughts wander on. No one had ever called her thin, dry husband a brilliant man, not even the most sycophantic place-hunter who had intrigued for a seat at her table. But in such terms had the first Authority to whom she had spoken characterized Godfrey. Not only was he the ordinary heroic young officer; he was a brilliant man, who would make his mark as part of the brain that controlled the destinies of the British Army. And all the sex in her humbled itself deliciously in the knowledge that this paragon of all Bayards, or this Bayard of all paragons, loved her with all his youth and manhood.

Presently she noticed a change in his happy face. A spasm of pain seemed to pass across it. He drew out the pole, stood with it poised. He drove it in again, his jaws set in an ugly way. She waited till the end of the stroke; then she rose to her feet.

"Stop, dear, stop. You're overdoing it."

"Overdoing what?"

"Your foot."

"Nonsense! Do sit down."

He gathered up the dripping pole preparatory for the thrust ; but she caught his arm.

" I'm sure your foot's hurting you."

" It isn't," he declared, bending his weight on it. " Not a little bit."

But even as he spoke he made an unconscious grimace.

" Do you love me ? "

He drew a sharp breath at the categorical question. In a thousand indirect ways he had told her of his devotion ; but he had never spoken the explicit words. He said quietly and half wonderingly :

" You know I love you."

" Then don't hurt me by hurting yourself."

" Do you really care what happens to me ? " he asked.

" I love you better than anything in the world," she said.

They paddled home somewhat sobered by the mutual declaration, about which they said nothing more. He admitted overstrain of the still sensitive tissues of the base of the stump, and railed at his misfortune. It was so humiliating to confess defeat. She smiled. There might, she said, be compensation. When they landed, she insisted on his leaning on her for support, during the walk up to the house, and, although he suffered damnable torture whenever he set the artificial foot to the ground, for his pressure on her adorable shoulder was of the slightest, his progress was one of deliciously compensating joy.

They dined decorously under the inscrutable eyes of butler and parlourmaid, and after dinner they called for coat and wrap and went out to sit on the moonlit terrace. As he put the fur-lined cloak round her, his hand touched her cheek. She put up a hand caress-

ingly and held his there while she looked up at him in the dimness. He bent down, greatly daring, and touched her lips. Then suddenly she clasped his head and held his kiss long and passionately.

CHAPTER XX

THEY arranged it all between them in the comfortingly short-sighted way of thousands of reprehensible couples before them. They spoke vaguely of a divorce as though the wretched Edgar were the conjugal offender, and pictured a time in the future, after the war, when they should marry and live the bright and perfect life. In the meanwhile they proposed to find much happiness and consolation together. He gave her, she declared, what she had vainly been hungering for since early childhood—love and sympathy and understanding. Into his sensitive ears she poured the story of her disastrous marriage : of the far separated lives of her husband and herself ; of his envies and trivial basenesses. Godfrey had thought her courted and flattered, a woman passing rich in love and friendship. Really she had moved the loneliest thing on earth. Didn't he see now what he meant to her ? She had been starving and he gave her food. If he withdrew it now, she would die.

This self-abasement from high estate established her martyrdom in the eyes of chivalrous youth. He swore eternal devotion, his soul registering the vow. They wrote frequently to each other, and met as often as they could. Three mornings a week, at an astonishingly early hour, she left her house soberly clad, for the purpose of working at a mythical canteen. On those mornings Godfrey waited for her at a

discreet distance round the corner of the square, in a two-seater car for which, as a crippled staff officer, he had contrived to obtain a petrol permit. An hour's run—Richmond Park, Barnes Common : it mattered little where—and Lady Edna went demurely home to breakfast and Godfrey to his day's work at the War Office.

Of the canteen Edgar Donnithorpe knew nothing, for she had merely tossed the invention to her maid, until one morning, coming down earlier than usual, he met her ascending the stairs.

"Good Lord!" said he. "What have you been doing at this unearthly hour?"

Irritated at having to lie to him, she replied : "I've been doing an hour's shift at a canteen. Have you any objection?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Why should I? If it pleases you and doesn't hurt the Tommies—poor devils."

His sneer jarred on her guilty sensitiveness. Her eyes hardened. "Why poor devils?"

"Like the rest of the country," he replied, "at the mercy of the amateur."

He turned with his thin laugh and left her speechless with futile anger. She wondered how she had ever regarded him otherwise than with unmitigated hatred.

She told the incident to Godfrey, having reached the point of confiding to him such domestic bickerings. He set his teeth and cursed the fellow. How could this incomparable angel dwell in the same house with him? She sighed. If it were not for the war. . . . But during the war the house was the centre of her manifold activities on behalf of the country. As for the social side of it, she would throw that up to-morrow only too gladly. Heavens, how weary she was of it all!

"I wish to God I could take you away with me!" said the young man fiercely.

"I wish you could, dear," she said in her caressing tone. "But in the meantime we have these happy little hours. We mustn't ask too much of fate."

"I only ask what fate gives to any man—that bus-driver and that policeman—the woman he loves."

"I'm afraid," she laughed, "if you heard the history of their *vie amoureuse*, you would be dreadfully disillusioned. It seems to me that everybody marries the wrong person in this muddle-pairing world. We must make the best of it."

At this period, infatuated though she was, she had no idea of breaking away from convention, even to the extent of setting up a household separate from her husband's. Social life was dear to her, for all her asseverations to the contrary, and dearer still the influence that she could command. Yet, as the days went on she noticed signs of restiveness in Godfrey. An hour thrice a week in an open car, when half his attention had to be devoted to the preservation of their own and other people's lives, scarcely satisfied his young ardour. The times when he could lounge free in her boudoir from four to six were over. As an officer on the staff of the Director-General of Operations, he knew no hours. The intricate arrangements for the mobility of the British Army did not depend on the convenience of young gentlemen at the War Office. Such had to scorn delight and live laborious days, which on the occasions of especial military activity were apt to run into the nights. Now and then, of course, Godfrey could assure himself an hour or so for lunch, but never could he foretell it on the day before. Only once, by hasty telephoning, did they manage to meet for lunch at the Carlton. In the evenings they were

a little more successful. Now and again a theatre together. But Godfrey, suddenly become sensitive on the point of honour, refused opportunities of dining at Belgrave Square.

"If I love a man's wife, I can't sit at his table and drink his wine and smile at him," he proclaimed bluntly.

"It seems," she said, at last, "there's nothing left but for me to run away with you."

"Why not?" he asked, laughing, for her tone was light.

"What about the British Army?"

He reflected. If she had said what about morality, or Christianity, or his immortal soul, he would have damned any item of them off-hand. But he couldn't damn the British Army. He temporized.

"I don't quite see."

"If you ran away with me, you'd have to run an awful long way, and leave the Army in the lurch."

"That would never do," said Godfrey.

"So we'll have to sacrifice ourselves for our country till the war's over," said Lady Edna.

Then, in spite of philosophic and patriotic resolve, the relations between them grew to be uncertain and dangerous. Aware of this, she sought to play rather the part of Egeria than that of the unhappy wife claiming consolation from her lover.

Now about this time arose rumours of political dissatisfaction in certain quarters; of differences of opinion between the civil and the military high authorities. Wild gossip animated political circles, and the wilder it became, the more it was fostered, here malignantly, there honestly, by political factions opposed to the Government or to the conjectured strategical conduct of the war. Lady Edna Donnithorpe, in the

thick of everything that darkened counsel, found the situation obscure. What were the real facts from the military point of view? She discussed matters with Godfrey, who, regarding her as his second self, the purest well of discretion, told her artlessly what he knew. As a matter of fact, she loyally kept her inner information to herself; but her eyes were opened to vast schemes of which the little political folk about her were ignorant. And one of the most ignorant and most blatantly cocksure about everything was Edgar Donnithorpe, her husband, whose attitude, in view of her knowledge, began to fill her with vague disquietude.

To all this political unrest, Baltazar was loftily indifferent.

"The scum of the world's hell-broth," said he. "Skim it off and chuck it away, and let us get on with the cooking."

He was cooking with all his might, preparing the ingredients of the contemplated new Ministry. Everything must be organized before the final step was taken. No fiasco like the jerry-built Ministry of National Service should be possible. Brains, policy, a far-spread scheme complete in detail first; then the building and the simple machinery of clerks and typists. He worked from morning to night, as indeed he had done all his life long. *The New Universe* sped full-sail on a course of fantastic prosperity. The man had the touch of genius that makes success. He spared himself neither mentally nor physically. He found time for enthusiastic work with the National Volunteers and the Special Constabulary, which formerly he had scorned. As a Special Constable he quickly gained promotion, of which he was inordinately proud. Said Marcelle:

"I believe that running about in an air raid is the greatest joy of your life."

To which, in his honest egotistical way, he replied:

"I'm not quite so sure that it isn't."

And Godfrey to Marcelle, discussing him:

"The dear old dynamo has hitched himself on to the war with a vengeance!"

He had. It absorbed him from the moment of waking to the moment of falling asleep. Since Godfrey's appointment at the War Office, father and son, living in the same house, met so seldom that they grew each to set an exaggerated value on the other. The boy, conscious not only himself of the force of the man, but of the tribute paid to it by the gods and demigods of the land, withdrew his original suspicious antagonism and surrendered loyally.

"I'm proud of him. By Jove, I am!" he said to Marcelle. "My childish faith is justified. I take back all I've said this last year. He's a marvel, and I'm glad I'm his son."

He saw perhaps, at this stage, more of Marcelle than of Edna. For Marcelle, shortly after her lunch with Baltazar on the day of Godfrey's river idyll, had broken down in health and left Churton Towers. The strain of three years' incessant work had ended in collapse. She was ordered three months' rest. After a weary fortnight alone in the Cornish country, she had come to London, in spite of medical advice, and shared the Bayswater flat of a friend, a working woman, engaged at the Admiralty. Chance, perhaps a little bit of design, for the motives that determine a woman's decision are often sadly confused, had thus brought her within easy walking distance of Sussex Gardens and of what the strange man to whose for-

tunes destiny seemed to link her, and whom uncontrollable fears and forces restrained her from marrying, loved to call the House of Baltazar. Of course, in his headstrong way, he had vehemently put the house at her disposal. He would fix up a suite of apartments for her where she could live, her own mistress, just as she chose. Godfrey, Quong Ho and servants could go to the devil. They could pig it anywhere about the house they liked. They would all agree on the paramount question of her comfort and happiness.

"In God's name, why not?" he cried with a large gesture. "What are you afraid of? Me? Mrs. Grundy? What?"

But Marcelle shook her head, smiling and stubborn, and would none of it. As a concession she agreed to run round whenever she heard through the telephone that she was wanted. Baltazar grinned and foretold a life of peripatetic discomfort.

"I'll risk that," she said.

Thus it happened that Marcelle was in and out of the house at all seasons, Godfrey clamouring for her as much as his father. Under vow of secrecy he confided to her his love affair. At first she professed deep disapprobation. He should remember her first suspicions and grave warnings. A married woman! No good could come of such an entanglement, no matter how guiltless and romantic. As delicately as he could he reminded her that she herself had cherished a romantic attachment to a married man. She had, further, avowed her readiness to run off with him. Edna and he were no whit worse than the impeccable Marcelle and his revered father. Whereupon, doting rather foolishly on the young man, she yielded, listened to the varied developments of his adventure, and gave

sympathy or moral advice, according to the exigencies of the occasion.

Her position of confidante, however, caused her many qualms of conscience. Her common sense told her that he was treading the path to an all too commonplace bonfire. The woman was some years older than he. Marcelle admitted her beauty and superficial charm ; but her feminine instinct pounced on insincerities, affectations and hardnesses undreamed of by the guileless worshipper. She divined, to her great dismay, a sudden sex upheaval in this young and self-thwarted woman rather than a pure passion of love. What ought she to do ? The question kept her awake of nights. She could not, without breaking the most solemn promise, ask counsel of Baltazar. Nor could she refuse to listen further to the boy. He would go his own way and leave her in the misery of incertitude. To go pleading to Lady Edna, like the heavy mother in a French play, was unimaginable. What then remained for her but to continue to receive his confidences ? And even then, if she met them with copybook maxims, he would turn on her with his original *tu quoque*, and, if she persisted, it would be equivalent to the withdrawal of her sympathetic attention. The only course, therefore, that remained open was to let things go on as they were, and, as far as it lay in her power, to keep his feet from pitfalls. His strange mixture, precipitated by the war, of child and man, appealed to all the woman within her. In her dealings with men—she saw him with pride at his father's table—he had the air and the experience of five-and-thirty. In dealing with women, even with her own motherly self, he was the romantic, unsophisticated boy of eighteen. His real age now was twenty-one. And at the back of her clean mind

lay the conviction that Lady Edna, however indiscreet she might be, could not make the complete and criminal fool of herself.

This conviction deepened when she had an opportunity of seeing them again together, at a little dinner party of six to which Baltazar had invited Lady Edna and the Jackmans. Between them it was "Godfrey" and "Edna" frank and undisguised. Their friendship was obvious; obvious, too, her charming assumption of proprietorship. But she carried it off with the air of a beautiful woman accustomed to such domination over the men she admitted to her intimacy. Beyond this, Marcelle could espy nothing; not a soft word, not a covert glance that betrayed a deeper sentiment. It is all play to her, she concluded, and grew happier in her mind.

Toward the end of the evening, after the Jackmans had gone, Lady Edna said lightly to Baltazar:

"This boy has told me all sorts of wonderful things about his den here, and I've never seen it."

Baltazar waved one hand and put the other on Godfrey's shoulder.

"He shall do the honours."

"Would you really like to see it?" Godfrey asked innocently.

"Of course I should. Your souvenirs——"

Baltazar beamed on them till they left the drawing-room.

"It's the best day's work I ever did for Godfrey," said he.

"What?"

"Getting him in with Lady Edna. A young fellow wants a clever woman to shepherd him. Does him no end of good. Broadens his mind."

"Mayn't it be a bit dangerous?" Marcelle hazarded.

"Dangerous? Suppose he does think himself in love with her? All the better. Keeps him out of mischief."

"But she might possibly fall in love with him too."

Wise in the hermit's theoretic wisdom, he dismissed such an absurdity with a scornful laugh.

"That type of woman can't fall in love. She's of the earth earthly, of the world worldly. Otherwise she couldn't have married that rat of a Donnithorpe."

"I suppose it's all right," said Marcelle.

"You belovedest mid-Victorian survival!" he laughed. "I do believe the young woman's proposal shocked you!"

They both would have been, if not shocked, at least brought to a sense of actual things, had they seen the transports to which the lovers surrendered themselves as soon as the door of the den closed behind them. Many hundreds of millions of youthful pairs have done exactly the same after long separation. She threw herself into his arms, in which he enfolded her. They kissed and sighed. They had thought they would never be alone again. He had been thirsting for her lips all the tantalizing evening. That wonderful brain of hers—to suggest this visit to his room. Even if the idea had occurred to his dull masculine mind, he wouldn't have had the daring to tender the invitation. Her ever new adorableness! And more kisses and raptures, until, side by side in the corner of the couch, they began to talk of rational matters.

"There are great things brewing," she said, after a while. "Just a whisper has reached me—enough to make it dangerous."

"What things do you refer to?" he asked, with a quick knitting of the brow.

She told him of a wild distortion of the plans of the High Command current in political dining-rooms.

"It's damnable!" he cried angrily. "One tiny grain of fact to a mountain of imagination. For God's sake, make it your business to go about crabbing the lie for all you're worth!"

"I will. When you really *know*, you can speak with such moral authority that you're believed, although you don't give away a bit of your knowledge. At least, anyone with a little experience can do it."

"And you're an adept," he said admiringly.

She drew him nearer, for he had started away on his proclamation of the damnability of rumours.

"What is the grain of fact?"

"Why, the great scale offensive."

"And where's the rest of the rumour incorrect?"

"I don't think I ought to tell you."

"But don't you see how important it is that a woman in my position, and a woman of my character, should know exactly? Half the calamities of the war are due to women giving away half-secrets of which they're not allowed to realize the consequences. Give a woman full confidence, and she'll be on the side of the angels."

He kissed her and laughed. Was she not one of the angelic band herself?

She pleaded subtly, her head on his shoulder, her deep blue eyes looking up into his, her breath on his cheek. Surely he and she were one. One heart, one mind, one soul. Individually each was the other's complement. He could work out vast schemes—the most junior of Third Grade Staff Officers glowed at the flattery—and she could see, not that they were put into execution, but that wicked and irresponsible

gossip should not bring them to naught. In her woman's wheedling she had no ulterior purpose in view. She was not the political adventuress unscrupulously seducing enamoured youth to the betrayal of his country. It was all insatiable curiosity and lust for secret power. And, as far as lay in her nature, she loved the boy ; she loved him with a sense of possession ; she craved him wholly, his devotion, his mind, his knowledge. His physical self was hers, at a moment's call. She played with that certainty in delicious trepidation. It invested their relationship in a glamour unknown, mysterious, in spite of her married estate. But the long-atrophied romantic in her sprang to sudden life and prevailed.

So subtly did she plead that he was unaware of her overmastering desire. Secure in her love and her loyalty, and confident in the twin hearts and souls, he told her what he knew ; but the numerical and topographical details, proving too confusing for her, he laughed and went over to his desk and, with her sitting over him on the arm of his writing-chair, sketched a map annotated with facts and figures on a sheet of note-paper. When he had done, she returned to the sofa and read the notes.

" Now I understand everything. It's tremendously exciting, isn't it ? "

" If it comes off."

She folded up the paper and put it in her bosom.

" Of course it'll come off."

" I say, sweetheart," he cried, watching the disappearing paper. " For Heaven's sake don't go leaving that about ! Better stick it in the fire."

" I'll do it as soon as I get home."

She took his hand in delightful intimacy and glanced at his wrist-watch. Then she started up. They

must get back at once, lest the others should subject their absence to undesirable conjecture.

"Oh, the elderly birds"—he laughed gracelessly—"they love to have a little billing and cooing now and then. They'll be grateful to us."

But she would not be detained. They went up to the drawing-room.

"He has got a perfect Hun museum downstairs," she said. "Each piece with a breathless history."

"What interested you most?" asked Marcelle.

"Me in a gas-mask," said Godfrey, lying readily, for never a glance had Lady Edna given to the trophies and spoils which she had set forth to see.

Later, after putting her into her taxi, he said through the window:

"You'll destroy that scrap of paper, won't you?"

"If you doubt me, I'll give it you back now," she replied rather sharply, thrusting her hand beneath her cloak.

What could ardent lover do but repudiate the charge of want of faith? She laughed, and answered in her most caressing tones:

"I'm glad, for where it is now it would be awfully awkward to get at."

The taxi drove off. Godfrey re-entered the house, his young head full of the thought of the paper on which he had written lying warm, deep down, in her bare and sacred bosom.

Lady Edna drove home to her solitary house, and without asking whether her husband was in or out, went straight to her bedroom. As soon as she could she dismissed her maid and sat in her dressing-gown for a long, long time, thinking as a woman thinks, when for the first time in her life she is not sure of herself, when she is all but at the parting of the ways and

when each way seems to lead to catastrophe. As a cold, ambitious girl she had sent the Natural packing ; now it had come galloping back. At last she rose and went to her dressing-table. On it lay the crumpled scrap of paper. She glanced at it. The figures and lines conveyed no meaning to her tired brain. What was the warfare in the world to the warfare in her soul ? She couldn't concern herself with the higher strategy to-night. To-morrow, when she was fresh, she would tackle the intricate scheme. She put the paper into a little secret drawer of her writing-table of which even her maid did not know the spring.

CHAPTER XXI

SHE would read the paper to-morrow, she had said. But on the morrow she awoke with a violent headache and stayed abed, and had only time to scramble into her clothes and attend a twelve o'clock committee meeting in Westminster. And for the remainder of the day, until she went to bed exhausted at midnight, she had not a minute to spare. The next morning she had her early appointment with Godfrey. She went forth into a raw air with a threat of autumn in it, and a slight drizzle from an overcast sky. The two-seater, with damp hood up, was waiting round the corner of the Square. She opened the door and jumped in, almost before he was aware of her approach, and rather hysterically flung her arms about him.

"Oh, darling, be good to me! I'm feeling so tired and miserable."

He proclaimed himself a brute for dragging her out on such a filthy morning. It was super-angelic of her to come, but he had scarcely expected her. Wouldn't it be better to go back home and rest?"

"No, no, dear," she murmured. "This is my rest. Beside you. Storm or sunshine, what does it matter, so long as we're together?"

"It doesn't matter to me," said he, driving off. "Hell and damnation would be Paradise if I always had you with me."

And in the same emotional key they talked all the time during their drive through a dank and dismal world. They felt like Paolo and Francesca in Watts's picture, clinging together alone in comfortless space, remote from War Office and wars and other affairs of men. She wailed :

"Oh, darling, if only I had met you before I made my wretched marriage !"

"Yes, by God !" said Godfrey, setting his teeth and feeling very fierce.

It did not occur to either of them, in their unhumorous mood, that when she married he was a gawky boy of sixteen.

Gradually they came to vital things.

"If I were little Mrs. Tomkins, whom nobody knows, we could get a hidden nest somewhere, you and I. It would be happiness, and it would be hurting or betraying nobody. But I'm Lady Edna Donnithorpe, related to half the peerage, and known by sight to everybody who looks at an illustrated paper."

"Why not cut everything and make a bolt of it ?" asked Godfrey, glaring straight in front of him at the cheerless, almost empty road, his young face set very stern.

"Your career——"

He cursed his career.

"Your soldier's post. How can you leave it ? You're doing a man's work for your country."

"The devil take it !" said he.

"Take what ?"

"The whole infernal universe," he growled, and swerved viciously so as to avoid imminent collision with an indignant motor-bus. Again they came to the bed-rock fact of his soldier's duty.

On their return journey it rained in torrents.

"You'll get wet through if you walk," said he, when they arrived at their trysting spot. "I'll drive you up to the house and chance it."

He chanced it, helped her out of the car and stood on the pavement, watching her until she had let herself in with her latchkey. She ran upstairs, to be confronted with her husband at the door of his room which was on the same landing. He was in his dressing-gown, and one side of his face was shaven, the other lathered.

"I thought you went to a canteen in the mornings?"

"So I do," she replied calmly.

"Does young Baltazar work there too?"

"Young Baltazar very often calls for me, when it rains, on his way to the War Office, and gives me a lift home."

"You're seeing far too much of that young man."

"The last time we discussed the Baltazar family," she said with a scornful laugh, "you accused me of an intrigue with his father. My dear Edgar, go on with your shaving and don't be idiotic."

She flung into her room angry and humiliated. After all, Edgar had the right to consider his good name, even though his jealousy could not proceed from betrayed affection. This was the first time he had referred to Godfrey in any way. Uneasiness beset her; so did the eternal question of the deceitful wife: "How much did he know?" They did not meet that day till dinner-time—it was one of the rare occasions on which they dined alone together—when he seemed to be making amends for the morning's attack by more than usual courteous conversation on current events. They parted amicably.

The next afternoon, arriving home very late, she

was surprised at seeing him coming, half dressed for dinner, from her room. He smiled in a friendly way and held up a button-hook.

"Mine's nowhere to be seen—that confounded new parlourmaid—I hope you don't mind."

"We're getting quite domestic," she said ironically.

"It's pleasanter," said he.

She wondered much at his graciousness for the next few days. He became attentive, manifested dry solicitude as to her health and her social and political interests. She dreaded a recrudescence of the thin sentiment that, on his part, had sanctioned their marriage. The fear tainted the joy of her visits to the mythical canteen. Sooner open hostility than this semblance of conjugal affection.

"I'm sorry, darling, to have been so mouldy," she said, taking leave of Godfrey one morning, "but the situation is getting on my nerves. I'm fed up."

A day or two later Edgar Donnithorpe entered her sitting-room, where she was writing letters.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Edna," said he, "but have you definitely decided to go to Moulsford this next week-end?"

"Certainly. I told you. The Barringtons and Susie Delamere and one or two others are coming."

"Do you mind if I don't turn up till Sunday?"

"Of course not," she replied. He was exceedingly polite.

"Thanks," said he. "The fact is, I want to ask a dozen men or so to dinner here. Only men, you know."

She glanced at him rather puzzled, for his proposal was an unprecedented departure from the custom of the house. Hitherto he had given his men's political dinner parties at his club. There had been no arrange-

ment or understanding between them as to this mode of entertainment, but so had it chanced to be; and he was a creature of routine.

"Of course. Just as you like. But what's wrong with the only place fit to dine at in London?"

"It's war-time, my dear," said he, eyeing her shiftily. "War-time. All the clubs have gone to the devil."

"All right. If you'll tell me how many are coming, I'll see to it."

"No, please don't. Please don't worry your head about it." He made a step forward and held up his thin hand in a deprecatory sort of way. "I'll fix it up. I don't want it to be the slightest bit of a concern to you. Thanks so much."

He hurried out. Lady Edna frowned at her half-written letter. A devious man, Edgar. What was in the wind? The cook the next day, however, submitted to her a menu which, with a housewifely modification or so, she passed, and thought no more of the material banquet.

During the week the hint of a rumour reached her, when, at a public meeting, she ran up against the Rt. Hon. Sir Berkeley Prynne, a Member of the Government who had been hostile to her husband for many years and had only given the hatchet superficial burial during the party truce.

"I suppose you know a lot of us are quaking in our shoes?" he said half banteringly.

"I don't," she said. "But I've no doubt it's good for you. What's the matter?"

"Signs of underground rumblings. Your quick ears have detected nothing?"

"No. Really. Honour bright. Do tell me."

He shook his head and laughed. "It'll be a wash-out," said he, moving away.

Gibe or warning, Sir Berkeley's words were not devoid of significance. They were aimed at her husband. Underground rumblings meant intrigue. She had long suspected Edgar of half-hearted support of the Government ; but passionate devotion to anything was so foreign to his crafty, opportunist nature, that she had not greatly troubled her mind about his loyalty. Here, however, was cause for deeper consideration. The old hacks, as she had said to Godfrey, were being squeezed out as decently as might be, so as to give place to fresher and honester men, and Edgar's position was daily growing more insecure. But she had thought he was sticking to it desperately. Was the worm about to turn ? And had the projected dinner-party anything to do with the turning ?

She asked him casually who were coming.

" Men connected with the business of the Ministry," he replied. " People I must be civil to and who don't expect us to worry about their women-folk."

And she had to be contented with the answer.

On the Saturday afternoon, at Moulsford, she was surprised to see Rolliter, the old butler, who she thought was staying the night at Belgrave Square to superintend the dinner-party. Why was he here ?

" Mr. Donnithorpe's orders, my lady. He said he could get on quite well without me this evening. I couldn't insist, my lady, but I didn't like leaving at all, especially as Lord Trevanion was coming."

" Lord who ? " she cried, for he had mentioned a name that was anathema maranatha in Government circles.

" I think it's Trevanion, my lady," said the butler, rather taken aback by her expression of incredulity. He fished a paper from his pocket and consulted it. " Yes, my lady. I saw the list on Mr. Donnithorpe's

table, so I copied it out so as to write the name-cards before I left."

An idea struck her. "You did this without Mr. Donnithorpe's orders?"

"Why, yes, my lady. Mr. Donnithorpe being so busy, I thought it might slip his memory."

"Did you write the cards?"

"No, my lady. When Mr. Donnithorpe told me to come down here, I asked him about the name-cards, and he said he didn't want them."

"Let me see the list," she said, recovering her languid manner.

"Certainly, my lady." He handed her the paper. "The only reason I mentioned Lord Trevanion," he continued, "was because I happen to know his lordship is one of the most particular men in England, and I couldn't bear to have things done anyhow when he was dining at the house."

She laughed in her charming way. "The blood's on Mr. Donnithorpe's head, not yours, Rolliter."

Rolliter had been in her father's service before she was born, and had followed her, as butler, when she married.

"Thank you, my lady," said he, retiring and leaving her with the list of guests.

It was an instructive and at the same time bewildering document. It contained the names of representatives of all the disgruntled and pacifist factions in England. No wonder Edgar dared not face the publicity of a club or restaurant dinner! No wonder he had lied to her about his guests. No wonder he had sent Rolliter to the country without writing out the cards. He wanted to hide the identity of his guests even from his butler! At each name a new shiver went down her back Lord Trevanion, blatant millionaire Little

Englander whom even the Radical Government of 1906 had joyfully allowed to purchase a peerage, so as to get him out of the House of Commons. There were Benskin and Pottinger and Atwater, members of a small Parliamentary gang who lost no opportunity of impeding the prosecution of the war. Lady Edna gasped. Finch of the Independent Labour Party. Was Edgar going mad? Samways, M.P. and Professor of History, pessimistic apostle of German efficiency and preacher of the hopelessness of the Allies' struggle. Editors of pacifist organs—Featherstone, the most brilliant, whose cranky brain had made him the partisan of England's enemies all through his journalistic career; Fordyce, snaky in his intellectual conceit; Riordan, dark and suspect. . . There were others, politicians and publicists, self-proclaimed patriots and war-winners, but openly hostile to the Government. Altogether the most amazing crew that ever Minister of the Crown delighted to honour.

That the ultimate object of this gathering was the overthrowal of the Government there could be no doubt. How they were going to manage it was another matter. A rabble like that, thought Lady Edna scornfully, could not upset a nervous old lady. It looked rather like a preliminary meeting, held in secrecy, to start the network in which greater personalities should be enmeshed and involved. At any rate, on the part of Edgar Donnithorpe it was black treachery. The more she scanned the list the more did her soul sicken within her. It seemed intolerable that this pro-German orgy should take place in the house of which she was the mistress, while she remained here, fooled, with her little week-end party. She burned with vengeance against her husband.

It was half-past four. She stood in the drawing-

room, which she had entered a few minutes before, leaving her guests on the lawn, in order to give some trivial order, and twisted the accusing paper in her hands, her lips thin, deep in thought. Presently into her eyes crept a smile of malice, and she went out of the French window and crossed the grass and joined her friends. There were only three, Colonel and Mrs. Barrington and Miss Delamere. A couple of men who were to have come down had providentially been detained in London.

"My dear people," she said, smiling. "The war has spread to Moulsford. There's nothing in the house for dinner. There'll be heaps to-morrow, but none to-night."

"I'll go down to the river and angle for a roach," said Colonel Barrington.

"Or else come with me to town and dine at the Carlton. I'll take you all in the Rolls-Royce. It will be a lovely run back."

"But, my dear, it'll be joy-riding!" cried Mrs. Barrington.

"It will be indeed," said Lady Edna.

"But suppose we're held up?"

"I'll say I have to see my husband on important political business."

"And I'm a soldier on active service," said Colonel Barrington, "and must be fed."

"You don't mind, do you?" asked Lady Edna.

Mind? Not they. What could be pleasanter on a perfect summer night? Besides, they had not tasted the guilty sweets of joy-riding for many months. It would be an adventure.

They started merrily about six o'clock. Lady Edna was in gay spirits, as though enjoying a schoolgirl's freak. Through the perfumed leafiness of Streatley,

Basildon, Pangbourne, they flew at the high speed of the great car, through Reading and Maidenhead and Slough, through Hounslow and Brentford. What was fifty miles? As they approached London, Lady Edna said:

"Will you think me funny if I look in at Belgrave Square for a minute?"

She spoke a word to the chauffeur. A while later the car swerved to the right from the direct route to Piccadilly, and at eight o'clock pulled up at the Donnithorpes' house in Belgrave Square. Lady Edna sprang from the car and tripped up the steps.

"I'll let myself in with my latchkey," she cried to the chauffeur, who was about to ring the bell.

In the hall she threw off her wraps, gave an instinctive tidying touch to her hair before a mirror, and walked smiling on her errand. She waved aside the hired stranger men-servants busy with plates outside the dining-room door and boldly entered.

For a second or two no one observed her, then one or two guests caught sight of the slender figure stately in her evening gown, and half rose from their chairs. So the attention of all was called to her. Edgar Donnithorpe, sitting at the head of the table with his back to the door, turned and sprang to his feet with a gasp. To stay polite commotion she laughed and held up her hand.

"Please don't anyone get up."

Her husband, in white anger, said:

"I thought you were at Moulsford, Edna. Is anything the matter?"

"Only your dinner party," she replied with derisive graciousness. "I happened to be dining in town, and it occurred to me to look in and see that your guests had everything they wanted—especially"—she

scanned the faces deliberately—"as they are all new to the house."

She bowed and withdrew. Her husband threw down his napkin and followed her. Neither spoke till they reached the hall, when they faced each other.

"I couldn't make a scene before all those men," he began.

"Of course you couldn't. I knew that," she interrupted.

"But I'll make one now. By God I will! What do you mean by this outrageous behaviour?"

"To queer your game, my friend. I thought it would be amusing to show all your pretty conspirators that the gaff was blown."

"I'm free to ask anyone to my own house. I'm master here, and the sooner you learn it the better. Are you aware that you've insulted the whole of my guests?"

"I flattered myself I behaved with peculiar courtesy," said Lady Edna. "It's you who are being rude to them. You had better go back. Are you coming down to Moulsford to-morrow?"

"No."

He flung away from her with an oath, then turned.

"You shall pay for this."

"Willingly. It's worth a lot."

He glowered at her impotently. What scene could he make other than one of vulgar recrimination? She had caught him in a domestic lie and a public act of treachery. For the moment his wife had all the weapons. So they stood there in the rosy light of the hall, deadly enemies; she triumphant, radiant in her scornful beauty; he small, thin, foxy and malignant. Presently, with a laugh she moved to the front door.

"I never thought you particularly clever, Edgar," she said. "But in diplomatic crudity you could give lessons to the Wilhelmstrasse."

With which Parthian shot she opened the door and rejoined her friends in the car.

"Forgive me, dear people," she said, settling in her place. "I've been having the time of my life."

She returned to town with her guests on Monday morning, but did not see her husband until late in the afternoon, when, on his return from the Ministry, he found her alone in her sitting-room.

"My dear Edna," said he, in a conciliatory tone, "we owe each other a little mutual understanding. It's so undignified to quarrel."

She put the book she was reading pages downward on her knee.

"Most undignified," she assented.

"You were rather under a misapprehension as to Saturday night."

"I'm glad to hear it," she said, "for I was going to ask you a question."

"What was that?"

"Have you sent in your resignation to the Prime Minister?"

"No, no. Of course not. That's where your error in judgment, if I may be allowed to say so, comes in. I'm aware I couldn't be seen publicly with that crowd. I had to manage a secret meeting. But it was in order to get them on our side. I thought a frank discussion with them might produce good results."

"Has it?"

"I think so," said he. "Oh, yes, I think so. I'm

speaking at Bristol to-night. You'll see from my speech what my position is. I mean to define it unmistakably."

"I'm glad to hear it."

She turned away, hating him and despising him more than ever. She passed a hideous day, overwhelmed with fears of treason and disaster.

They were justified the following morning when, looking through the newspapers brought to her bedside, she first glanced at and then pored over the leading article in the important daily edited by Fordyce, one of the guests at the amazing dinner-party. It was an attack on the Government's conduct of the war, based, ostensibly, on the rumours whose inaccuracy Godfrey had begged her to contradict, but, to those with inner knowledge, on the real facts of the plan of the High Command. It was done with diabolical craft. Challenged as to the source of his information, Fordyce could point to the article and defy anyone to prove that he was possessed of any esoteric information at all. It was mere logical deduction from the general trend of the war policy of the Allied Military Authorities. And yet the shivering woman knew that the scheme had been divulged to Fordyce. How? In terror she sprang from her bed and opened the secret drawer of her desk. The sheet of note-paper was there just as she had left it. For a moment or two she stood, her hand on her breast, laughing in a silly way. Edgar was capable of many things; but not of rifling her private papers. He was capable of betraying the Government to Fordyce, but as a Minister, she reflected, he would possibly be aware of the scheme. As the Saturday evening host he had communicated it to Fordyce. Possibly to others. But no. That would have been madness. A man does

not blacken himself to a dozen men at once. The others he had assembled so as to prepare them, in his underhand, insinuating way, for this master-stroke. . . . She closed the secret drawer with an impatient snap, and went about the room clenching her hands and uttering futile words.

"The villain! The infernal villain!"

No. Life with him henceforth was impossible. She would break away. . . . She had her house at Moulsford, her own income. As for her London life, she could take a suite at Claridge's. In the indignant moment she almost forgot Godfrey. Loathing of Edgar overspread all other thoughts. Suddenly she remembered his Bristol speech, and ran through *The Times* to find the report. Condensed, it contained nothing but the facile, uninspired claptrap that had characterized his public utterances since the beginning of his career. He was lying to the country which he had set out to betray. . . . Meanwhile—so her excited fancy told her—he was a peril running loose about the world. What could she do? Drive off then and there and denounce him to the Prime Minister? He would certainly ask her why she connected the leader in *The Morning Gazette* with the dinner-party given to her husband's political opponents. Whence did she derive her knowledge that anything more than conjecture underlay the criticism in Fordyce's paper? And she would not have a word to say. Once again she opened the drawer and took out Godfrey's notes. Better destroy them. Her fingers met in the middle of the sheet, prepared to tear. Then she paused. No. She thought of Sir Berkeley Prynne—a man of unstained honour in private and public life. She would go to him, this in her hand, tell the whole story and ask his advice.

She thrust the paper back into the drawer, rang for her maid and dressed.

A busy woman's correspondence kept her occupied all the morning. At half-past twelve came a telephone call from Godfrey :

" When and where can I see you ? Something most important."

" Oh, darling, what is it ? " Her voice shook. " Where are you ? "

" War Office. I can't tell you anything over the phone. Besides, I haven't a minute. I'll be free in about half an hour."

" Come round here. I shall be alone."

" Right."

He switched off, leaving her in throbbing suspense. Naturally he was coming to her about *The Morning Gazette* article. To her excited fancy the whole War Office was in a state of blind ferment like an ant-heap bombed with a drop of kerosene. His tone, too, had been brusque, imperious, that of a man dealing with crisis. She wished she had gone at once in search of Sir Berkeley Prynne, instead of wasting her morning over correspondence. Still, when one is Chairman and Treasurer of practical concerns, their business has to be attended to. She went on with her work, her eyes on the little agate clock in front of her.

The rattle of a car. A moment of horrible waiting. Rolliter at the door.

" Captain Baltazar, my lady."

They stood for a breathless second until the butler had closed the door behind him. Then he strode up and caught her in his arms. When she could collect herself she looked into dancing, triumphant eyes. A wave of relief swept through her. Suddenly she

caught the echo, as it were, of Rolliter's announcement.

"Captain—— ?"

"Yes. And more than that. I'm going to France."

She felt herself grow pale. "My dear——"

"It's a great stunt," he said exultantly. "Northby has got an Army Corps. He wants me on his staff. I'm going out as the Brainy One, with a step in rank. Old man Widdowes talked to me as if I were an infant Haig. You could have knocked me down with a bunch of straw."

"I'm so glad, dear. I'm so glad you've got what you want."

"Great, isn't it ?" said he, all aglow. "It's the best thing a one-footed cripple has done up to now. The W.O. isn't the real thing. Out there it is. As soon as I met you, I swore I'd make good. To be worthy of you, if such a thing is possible."

"I'm a proud woman," said Lady Edna. "But I don't understand—General Northby—I never heard——"

"Of course you didn't. Neither did I. It was all secrecy and suddenness."

He explained roughly the circumstances.

"And when do you go out ?"

"In three days' time. I'm on leave till then."

"Three days ?" She looked at him aghast. "And then you go away indefinitely ?"

She paused, drew a long breath or two, and sank limply into a chair. He looked at her rather wonderingly.

"What about me, Godfrey ?"

In the gratification of his wildest boyish ambitions he had forgotten her woman's point of view. He had expected her to share his elation. Remorseful,

he bent quickly over her, reddening and stammering. He was a selfish brute. Did he really matter so much to her? If she would but say the word, he would go straight back and refuse the appointment.

"Don't talk like a child," she said. "If you did such a thing, we should despise each other for the rest of our lives. But three days—only three days! And I'm at my wits' end with unhappiness."

He sank lover-like by her side and took her hand. What was wrong?

"Have you seen *The Morning Gazette*?"

He laughed. "Oh yes! There's a fine old hullabaloo! But the beauty of it is, that the whole thing went fut three or four days ago. I can't tell you why. We're working out quite a different plan. All the same, there's loud cursing in the camp." He looked at her with one of his swift man's glances. "Of course, dearest—I'm bound to ask—you never breathed a word to anybody of what I told you?"

"Not a word."

"And you destroyed that paper at once?"

"Of course."

The lie was out before she realized it. Well, it didn't matter. The thing was obsolete. She would tear it up. No. She wouldn't. She still had to wage her war against her husband, with the aid of Sir Berkeley Prynne, and the document would be of great value.

"It was *he* who gave it away to the editor of *The Morning Gazette*," she said vindictively.

"But how the deuce could he have known?" asked Godfrey. "These things are dead secrets. They never go beyond the Army Council."

"He did know, anyhow. I've not seen you since. I've a lot to tell you."

She told him. He scrambled to his feet.

"My God! what a swine! You must leave him."

"I'm going to. I'm going to hound him out of public life."

"And then?"

"It's for you to say."

An hour later Godfrey ran down the steps of the house in Belgrave Square, his head in a whirl.

CHAPTER XXII

BALTAZAR and Quong Ho were finishing lunch when Godfrey, flushed and excited, burst in with his news. An enthusiastically sympathetic parent failed to detect an unusual note, almost one of vainglory, in the boy's speech and manner. He vaunted his success, proclaimed his entry on a brilliant career. He talked wildly. This to be a war to end war? A maudlin visionary's dream. We might crush the Hun this time and have a sort of peace—a rotten politician's peace, but the Hun would apply himself to the intensive cultivation of Hate, and in twenty years at the latest would have another go at Frightfulness. And that's where the modern scientific soldier would come in. That was his career. He saw it all before him. And Baltazar, led away by the boy's bright promise, clapped both his hands on his shoulders in a powerful grip, and cried :

" I'm proud of you ! By Jove, I'm proud of you ! You and I will make our name famous again, as it was in the days of Admiral de Coligny. We'll do things. We'll make this rocking old Europe hum." He laughed, and fire leaped into his eyes. " It's good to be alive these days ! "

" It is. It's glorious ! " replied Godfrey.

Quong Ho, smiling, urbane, approached with outstretched hand.

" I hope I may be allowed to offer you my sincere

congratulations," said he. "Although I do not see eye to eye with you in your prognostication of a recrudescence of warfare after the pacification of this present upheaval, yet——"

But Godfrey slapped him on the back, interrupting his eloquence.

"That's all right, you dear old image. When you get your Fellowship, I'll say the same to you."

He cut a hunk from a cake on the table and poured out a whisky and soda.

"My dear boy," cried Baltazar, darting to the bell, "haven't you lunched? You must have a proper meal."

Godfrey restrained him. No. He hadn't time. He must leave London that afternoon, for a day or two, and the next two or three hours would be a mad rush. A shade of disappointment passed over Baltazar's face.

"I was hoping we might have a little dinner to-night to celebrate your appointment—just ourselves, with Marcelle—and Lady Edna, if she could come."

A smile flickered round Godfrey's lips.

"Dreadfully sorry, sir," said he. "I'm not my own master. Anyhow, I know Lady Edna's engaged. But my last night—yes, if you will. I'd love it."

As soon as he had bolted food and drink, he rushed out. He must throw some things into a bag, said he. Presently he returned and took hurried leave. Baltazar gripped him by the hand and God-blessed him. At the door Godfrey nodded to Quong Ho.

"Just a word, old chap."

Quong Ho followed him into the hall.

Baltazar went to the open dining-room window, and presently saw Godfrey clamber into his little two-seater. He waved a hand.

"Good luck!"

"See you on Friday, sir."

The car drove off. Quong Ho returned to the dining-room.

"I think, sir," said he, "that we have just parted from a happy young man."

"If a man's not happy when he gets his heart's desire at twenty-one," said Baltazar, "he had better apply for transference to another planet. I threw mine away," he added in a tone of reminiscence. "Wilfully. I ought to have been Senior Wrangler. But I was a fool. I was always taking false steps. That's the wonderful thing about Godfrey, Quong Ho, as doubtless you've noticed—he always takes the right steps. A marvellously well-balanced mind." He smiled in a meditative way, thanking Heaven for sparing Godfrey those storms of temperament in which he had so often suffered shipwreck. A steady chap, disciplined, not to be turned out of his course. "Well, well," said he, "now from refreshment to labour. Come upstairs and let us get on with the work."

It was the long vacation, and Quong Ho, tireless and devoted, was replacing Baltazar's secretary absent on a much-needed holiday. A busy afternoon lay before them. That evening the week's number of *The New Universe* must go to press; the final proofs be passed, modifying footnotes added to bring statements and arguments up to the hour's date, so swift were the kaleidoscopic variations in the confused world-condition; and Baltazar's own editorial summary, the dynamo of the powerful periodical, had to be finished.

They sat in Baltazar's library, at the orderly piled writing-table, very much as they had sat, a year ago, in the scholarly room at Spendale Farm. But now

no longer as master and humorously treated pupil. The years of training had borne excellent fruit, and Quong Ho proved himself to be an invaluable colleague; so much so that Baltazar, at times, cursed the University of Cambridge for depriving him, for the greater part of the year, of one of the most subtle brains in the kingdom. Quong Ho could point unerringly to a fallacy in an argument; he seemed to be infallible on questions of fact in war politics; and such a meticulously accurate proof-corrector had never been born. In such a light at least did his *rara avis* appear to Baltazar. They worked in silence. Baltazar furiously inditing his article, Quong Ho, pen in hand, intent on the proofs. The open window admitted the London sounds of the warm summer afternoon. Presently Baltazar rose and cast off coat and waistcoat, and with a sigh of relief at the coolness of shirt-sleeves, sat down again.

"Why don't you do the same?"

Quong Ho, impeccably attired in a dark suit and a high stiff collar, replied that he did not feel the heat.

"I believe it would hurt you not to be prim and precise," said Baltazar. "I wonder what would happen if you really ever let yourself go?"

Quong Ho smiled blandly. "I have been taught, sir, that self-discipline is the foundation of all virtue."

Baltazar laughed. "You're young. Stick to it. I've had as much as is good for me at my time of life. I'm going to end my days, thank God, in delightful lack of restraint. I'm going to let myself go, my friend, over this new job, like a runaway horse. At last I've bullied them into giving me a free hand. It's a change from a year ago, isn't it?"

"I agree that the change has been most beneficent," said Quong Ho.

"Yes, by Jove!" cried Baltazar. "Then we were just a couple of grubby bookworms doing nothing for ourselves or our fellow-creatures. Now—here you are dealing with thoughts that shake the world; and I—by Jove!—one of the leading men in England. I should like to see the bomb that would knock us out this time."

He hitched up his shirt-cuffs and plunged again into his article. He had scarcely written a sentence, when the door opened and Marcelle appeared on the threshold. He pushed back his chair and rose, and advanced to her with both hands outstretched.

"Hello! Hello! What has blown you in at this time of day?"

She looked up at him as she took his hand, and he saw there was trouble in her eyes.

"I know I'm disturbing you, but I can't help it," she said quickly. "I must speak to you."

"Perhaps you would like to speak with Mr. Baltazar in private," said Quong Ho.

"Indeed I should, Mr. Ho. Please forgive me."

Quong Ho bowed and retired. Baltazar drew a chair for her.

"Now what's wrong, my dear?"

"Godfrey."

"My God!" he cried. "Not an accident? He's not hurt?"

"Oh no, no! Nothing of that sort." She smiled in wan reassurance.

Baltazar breathed relief. "I believe if anything happened to him now, it would break me," he said.

"He came round to see me an hour or so ago."

"After he left here. To tell you of his appointment. Aren't you glad?"

"Of course I am. But I should be more glad if that had been all."

"What's up?" he asked, frowning. "Tell me straight."

"Ought I to tell you?" she asked rather piteously. "It's betraying his confidence shamefully. I know I'm to blame. I ought never to have given him my promise. But I can't see him go and ruin everything without making some sacrifice."

"My dearest Marcelle, you're talking in riddles. For Heaven's sake give me the word of the enigma."

"It's Lady Edna Donnithorpe."

"Well. What about her?"

"I wish he had never set eyes on the woman," she cried passionately.

"If he's in love with her, he'll have to get over it," said Baltazar. "France will cure him. And, as I told you the other evening, the lady's perfectly callous. So, my dear, go along and don't worry."

"You don't seem to understand me, John dear," she said urgently. "The woman is in love with him. It has been going on for months. He has told me all about it. She gets up and goes out driving with him in the car at eight o'clock in the morning."

"Silly woman!" growled Baltazar.

"Silly or not, she wouldn't do it if she didn't care for him. Not Lady Edna Donnithorpe. They meet whenever they can. He comes to me and pours out everything. I ought to have told you. But I couldn't break my word. They're lovers——"

"Lovers? What do you mean?" he asked, bending his heavy brows.

"Not yet. Not in that sense, I'm sure. But they soon will be." She looked at him anxiously. "I know I'm going to forfeit Godfrey's affection, and

perhaps your respect—but I can't do otherwise." She paused, then burst out desperately : " She's going to run away with him this afternoon."

" The devil she is ! " cried Baltazar. He strode about the room and threw up his hands. " Oh, the damned young fool ! " He wheeled round on Marcelle. " Why on earth didn't you stop it ? "

She pleaded helplessness. How could she ? Naturally she had used every argument, moral and worldly. As it was, he had dashed off in a fume, calling her unsympathetic and narrow-minded, regretting that he had ever given her his confidence. He had promised long ago to let her know everything. Now that he had kept his word she turned against him. She had been powerless.

" He's old enough to look after his own morals," said Baltazar, " and I'm not the silly hypocrite to hold up my hands in horror. But to go and run away with the most notorious society woman in London and play the devil with his career is another matter. Oh, the damned young fool !—That rat Edgar Donnithorpe will get on to it at once. He's just the man to stick at nothing.—A filthy divorce case.—The boy'll have to resign, if he doesn't get chucked—then marry the woman five years older than himself. Where's the happiness going to be ? "

He resumed his striding about the room, in his impetuous way, and Marcelle followed him timidly with her eyes. " Oh, damnation ! " said he. He had just been lecturing Quong Ho on Godfrey's steadiness and balance. Why, he himself had never done such a scatter-brained thing.

" Where are the precious pair going ? "

A remote week-end cottage, she said, belonging to a complaisant friend of Lady Edna's. Five miles from

station, post office or shop. A lonely Eden in the wilderness. Whether it was north, east, south or west of London she did not know. An old woman in charge would look after them.

"I suppose they're well on their way by now," said he.

"I don't know. Possibly not. He said he had to rush about town to order his kit. Besides," she added hopelessly, "what does it matter when they start?"

Baltazar raved impotently.

"There's nothing I wouldn't give for it not to have happened," he exclaimed. "I suppose I was a fool. You warned me. And it was I who, like an ass, encouraged them. I could kick myself!"

"It's like you, John dear, not to blame me," she said humbly.

"Of course I don't blame you. You thought it boyish folly. . . . What's the good of talking about it?"

They did talk, however, in a helpless way.

"They had no intention of doing anything desperate," she said, "until this morning. If he had remained in London, they might have gone on indefinitely. The prospect of endless months in France set the whole thing ablaze. . . . When I put the moral side before him, he retorted with a *tu quoque*."

"What did he mean?"

"That I was ready, at his age, to run away with a married man."

"Were you?" he asked.

"I suppose so," she replied with a weary little smile.

"That was an entirely different affair."

"Not from the moral point of view."

"Oh, damn morals," said he.

She laughed in spite of her distress. It was so characteristic of the man. If anything got in his way, he just damned it, and regarded it as non-existent.

He moved restlessly about; then, catching sight of his discarded coat and waistcoat, plunged savagely into them, as though he were going in pursuit of the erring pair.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said, abandoning half-way the furious buttoning of his waistcoat. "That's the devil of it, there's nothing to be done."

At that moment Quong Ho discreetly appeared at the door.

"Will you have particular need of my services for the next hour?"

"Yes, of course I shall. Look there!" Baltazar flung a hand towards the paper-strewn table. "We go to press this evening."

Quong Ho consulted his watch. "I am sorry then, for I don't know how I shall proceed. I promised Captain Godfrey to take his bag to the railway station at five o'clock."

Smiles wreathed Baltazar's face of annoyance, and he exchanged a quick glance with Marcelle.

"What railway station?"

"Waterloo."

"I thought he had taken his kit with him in the car."

"He explained, sir, when he called me into the hall before he left, that he couldn't garage the car at Waterloo station."

"I see," said Baltazar.

"Therefore I am to seek it in his bedroom and convey it by taxi to Waterloo."

Baltazar nodded approvingly, and the humorous

light appeared in his eyes which Quong Ho could never interpret.

"It's very lucky you've told me, Quong Ho. I want particularly to say a word or two to Godfrey before he leaves London. I'll take his bag. You get on with the work. Perhaps you'll send somebody out for a taxi."

"I'll fetch one myself," said Quong Ho, and bowing as usual politely to Marcelle, left the room.

Baltazar clutched her arms with both hands lifted her from her seat and, laughing exultantly, kissed her a hearty, unintelligible kiss—the first for twenty years—leaving her utterly bewildered.

"The Lord has delivered them into my hands!" he cried. "The stars in their courses fight for the House of Baltazar."

"What in the world are you going to do?" she asked.

"Play hell," said he.

Ten minutes afterwards Baltazar was speeding eastwards, grimly smiling. By skilful contrivance he had despatched the helpful Quong Ho upstairs to Marcelle at the last moment, and had pitched Godfrey's kit into the dining-room and had driven off without it. If the infatuated youth would not listen to reason or the lady to the plainest of speech, he should go off to his love in a cottage unromantically destitute of tooth-brush and pyjamas. Ridicule kills. The boy would hate him for the moment; but would assuredly live to bless him. Once in France, he would have no time for folly. The imperious man's thoughts flew fast. The lady herself should cure the boy. He would see to that. If he couldn't break an Edna Donnithorpe, bring her to heel, he was not John Baltazar. In his jealousy for the boy's honourable

career he swept the woman's possible emotions into the limbo of inconsiderable things. What kind of a woman was she, anyhow, to have married a rat like Donnithorpe? He read her in rough intolerance. Just a freak of thwarted sex. That was it. If nothing was discovered, she would return to her normal life and, sizing up the episode in her cold intellectual way, would discover that the game was not worth the candles supplied by the old woman in the remote cottage, and would send Godfrey packing to any kind of Byronic despair. If the intrigue came out and there was a divorce and subsequent marriage, there would be the devil to pay.

The taxi clattered through the gloomy archway approaches to Waterloo and drew up at the end of the long line of cabs at the entrance to the station. The summer exodus from London was just beginning, and the outside platform was a-bustle with porters, trucks, passengers and luggage. Baltazar, after paying his fare, lingered for a moment at the great door of the Booking Hall, and then entered and passed through it into the hurrying station. A queue stood at the suburban ticket office. He scanned it, but no Godfrey. He walked the length of the platform entrances, through the crowds of passengers and their dumps of luggage and knots of soldiers, some about to entrain, sitting on the ground with their packs around them, others, newly arrived on leave: Australians with their soft hats, wiry Cockneys still encased in the clay of the trenches, officers of all grades and of all arms. Presently at the central bookstall, turning away, his arms full of periodicals, Godfrey came into view. Baltazar approached smiling. His son's face darkened.

"I didn't expect to see you here, sir."

"If you want to study the ways of a country, there's

nothing like its great railway stations. They're a favourite haunt of mine."

"It's rather stuffy under this glass roof, don't you think?" said Godfrey.

"I don't mind it, my boy," replied Baltazar cheerfully. "But it's lucky I hit upon Waterloo. I shall be able to see you off. By the way, where are you going?"

"Somewhere Southampton way, sir," said Godfrey stiffly.

"Lot of light literature," remarked Baltazar, motioning to the periodicals.

"Quite a debauch," said Godfrey.

Baltazar's quick eyes picked out the board by the Southampton platform.

"Your train, I see, goes at 5.45. You're a bit early."

"Yes, sir. It's such a long time till the train starts that I couldn't think of asking you to wait."

"That doesn't matter a bit, my dear boy. Time is no object."

"I'm very sorry to be rude, sir—but as a matter of fact I have an appointment," said Godfrey desperately. "An important appointment."

"Oh!" said Baltazar.

"And if you don't mind, I must wait outside the station. Quong Ho is bringing my suit-case. I shouldn't like to miss him."

He made a step forward, but an ironic glitter in his father's searching eyes arrested the movement.

"Quong Ho isn't bringing your suit-case. I've come instead."

Godfrey drew himself up haughtily. "I don't understand. Have you been kind enough to bring my luggage?"

"No," replied Baltazar calmly. "It's on the floor of the dining-room."

"Your interference with my arrangements, sir, is unwarrantable," said the boy, pale with anger.

"Possibly. Unless we adopt the Jesuitical principle of the end justifying the means."

"And what is the end, might I ask?"

"To prevent you from making an infernal fool of yourself."

The young man regarded him inimically. Baltazar felt a throb of pride in his attitude. A lad of spirit.

"I suppose Marcelle came straight to you with my confidence. In giving it to her I made a fool of myself, I admit. As for what I propose to do, I fail to see that it's any concern of yours."

Baltazar's heart yearned over the boy. He said in a softened tone: "It is ruin to your career and a mess-up of your whole life. And your future means so much to me that I'd sacrifice anything—honour, decency, even your affection which I thought I had gained—to see you off at any rate to France with a clean sheet."

But Godfrey in cold wrath did not heed the pleading note. He had been betrayed and tricked. Only his soldier's training kept him outwardly calm. To the casual glances of the preoccupied crowd passing by them nothing in the demeanour of either man gave occasion for special interest. They stood, too, in a little islet of space apart from the general stream of traffic. Baltazar went on with his parable. He had not the heart to hint his projected gibe at the unromantic lack of tooth-brushes. Things ran too deep.

"I admit none of your arguments," said Godfrey at last. "Besides, I am my own master. I owe you a debt for many kindnesses; your affection—I don't

undervalue it. But there things end. After all, we met a year ago as strangers. I've run my life as I chose, and I mean to run it as I choose. I expect Lady Edna to arrive at any minute. In common delicacy I must ask you to let me go my own ways."

"All right, go," said Baltazar. "But I'll go with you."

Godfrey's eyes flamed.

"You wouldn't dare!"

"My dear fellow," said Baltazar, "I don't think there's a thing in the world that I wouldn't dare. Haven't you found that out?"

So they stood there for a while longer, talking in their islet beneath the glass roof of the busy station, and the boy's heart was filled with anger and wild hatred of the thick-shouldered, smiling man, with the powerful face and infernal dancing eyes.

Then suddenly Baltazar strode away at a great pace, and Godfrey, turning, saw that he was cutting off Lady Edna who had entered, preceded by a porter wheeling her luggage. Before he had time to overtake him, Baltazar was already taking off his hat to an amazed lady and had imperiously checked the porter.

"Lady Edna," said he, "I'm here to prevent Godfrey and yourself from committing the insanity of your lives."

She said, mistress of herself: "I don't understand you, Mr. Baltazar. You seem to be taking an outrageous liberty. I am going to stay at the house of a friend who has asked Godfrey to be my fellow-guest."

Before Baltazar could reply, Godfrey came hurrying up with his slight limp and plunged into angry explanations. She looked at the clock.

"If you telephone home now," she said coolly, "a servant will have ample time to bring your things."

"By God, yes!" said Godfrey, angrily depositing the sheaf of periodicals on her luggage.

"Have you got the tickets?"

"Of course."

He marched away across the station.

"Porter——" said Lady Edna.

But no porter was there, for, unperceived by either of the lovers, Baltazar had slipped five shillings into the man's hand and told him to come back later.

"There's heaps of time," said Baltazar. "Now, my dearest lady, what is the good of make-believe? Cards on the table. You're going to make a bolt with Godfrey and throw your cap over the windmills. There's a nice little cottage in a wood—in the depths of the New Forest, I presume, lent you by a friend who is represented by one solitary old woman."

"How do you know that?" she asked, her soft eyes hardening in their characteristic way. "Godfrey has surely not been such a—"—she paused for a word—"well—such an imbecile as to tell you?"

"Godfrey has told me nothing. You may be certain of that. His fury against me is sufficiently obvious."

"Then how do you know?"

"That's my affair," smiled Baltazar. "Lady Edna," said he, "don't you think that my coming the heavy father like this puts you into rather an absurd position?"

She replied, white-lipped: "I'll never forgive you till I'm dead!"

"I've naturally counted on the consequences of your resentment," said Baltazar.

"What do you propose to do?"

"If you persist, to thrust upon you the displeasure of my company, without luggage—just like Godfrey."

"You——" she began indignantly. And then suddenly: "Oh, my God!" and clutched him by the arm.

He followed her stare across the station, and there, in the archway of the Booking Hall, peering from right to left in his rat-like way, stood Edgar Donnithorpe.

CHAPTER XXIII

"YOU seem to have managed your little affair rather clumsily," said Baltazar.

"What's he doing here?" she asked wildly.

"Probably catching you and Godfrey."

"He mustn't see Godfrey here."

"That's easily managed," said Baltazar. "I'll send him flying out of the telephone box. But what on earth could have put your husband on the track? What indiscretion have you been committing?"

"I left a letter for him telling him I wouldn't stay any longer in his house. He's a traitor to his country."

Baltazar threw up his hands. "Oh, Lord! The usual idiocy. For a clever woman—well! Anyhow, I'll head off Godfrey. When your husband spots you, use your brains. Don't say a word to give yourself away."

"You'll come back?" she cried, losing her head.

"I'll see," said he.

He left her, and fetched a compass round the station, mingling as much as possible with the never-ceasing throng of soldiers and civilians and women and luggage, until he arrived at the row of telephone boxes. There he found Godfrey, waiting his turn and fuming at the delay.

"My boy," said he, "here are all the elements of a first-class farce. The injured husband, Edgar Donni-

thorpe, has turned up. You had better make tracks as quick as you can."

"I suppose you gave him the hint," snarled the young man, with set teeth.

"You're insulting your own blood to make such a damfool remark," said Baltazar. "Go home, and stay there till I come."

Godfrey met the infernal eyes and, for all his anger and humiliation, knew that he had accused basely.

"I apologize, sir," said he, in his most haughty and military manner, and marched off.

Baltazar hesitated. Should he or should he not return to Lady Edna? If he had escaped the eye of Edgar Donnithorpe, it were better to leave Lady Edna, injured innocent, to tell her tale of solitary retirement to sylvan depths where she could be remote from the consequences of his political turpitude. On the other hand, if he had been observed, or if Lady Edna had avowed his presence, his abandonment of her might be idiotically interpreted. He decided to return.

He saw them at once through the moving traffic: the husband, his back towards him, gripping a handle of the truck on which the luggage was piled; the wife facing him, an ironical smile on her lips. A devilish handsome woman, thought Baltazar. The boy had taste. There she stood, slim, distinguished in her simple fawn coat and skirt and little hat to match, beneath which waved her dark brown hair, very cool, aristocratic and defiant. Baltazar came up to them.

"Ah, Donnithorpe!"

The thin, grey man wheeled round, and then Baltazar realized that he had made the wrong decision, for he was the last man the other expected to see.

"You? What are you doing here?" he shouted.

"Hush!" said Lady Edna, with a touch on his arm.

"You're not at home or in the House of Commons. You're in a public place, and you'll get a crowd round us in no time. Let us pretend we're a merry party going on a holiday."

Edgar Donnithorpe threw an anxious glance round to see if they had attracted undesired attention. But people passed them by or stood in knots near them, unheeding, intent on their own affairs.

"I ask you," he said in a low voice, "what are you doing at this railway station with my wife?"

Baltazar, his felt hat at the back of his head and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets beneath the skirts of his buttoned-up, double-breasted jacket, eyed him in exasperating amusement.

"I am seeing Lady Edna off on a railway journey. Was it necessary to ask your permission?"

Lady Edna laughed mockingly. "As far as I can make out, my husband expected to find me eloping with your son Godfrey."

Donnithorpe shifted his eyes from one to the other, looking at them evilly.

"He was with you for nearly a couple of hours to-day. I had my own very good reasons for suspicion. I went round to your house, Mr. Baltazar, and asked for your son. I saw your Chinese secretary——" He caught Baltazar's involuntary sudden frown and angry flush. "In justice," he continued in his thin, sneering manner, "I must absolve him from indiscretion. He knows my position in the Government, and when I informed him that it was imperative I should see your son on important political business, he told me I should find him at Waterloo station."

"You overreached yourself," said Baltazar with a bantering grin. "Godfrey knows no more about politics than a tom-cat. Quong Ho naturally thought

you meant me. You came. Here I am, seeing your wife off. She telephoned me that she was leaving your house—going to stay with friends—wanted a man of the world's advice on the serious step she was taking —womanlike, of course, she took the step first and asked for advice afterwards—and I naturally put myself at her ladyship's disposal. Don't you think you had better let Lady Edna get on with her journey? Here's her porter. Come with me and see her safe into her carriage."

He was enjoying himself amazingly. Donnithorpe baffled, tugged at his thin grey moustache. The porter came up, touching his cap.

"Time's getting on, ma'am. I've reserved the two seats——"

"One seat," said Lady Edna swiftly.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am. I thought you said the gentleman was going with you."

"One seat. I said I was meeting a gentleman."

The porter wheeled off the luggage. Lady Edna turned to follow, but her husband gripped her viciously by the wrist.

"Not yet."

"Drop that," growled Baltazar.

Donnithorpe released her, plunged his hand into his breast pocket and drew out a couple of sheets of paper.

"You did say two seats. You meant to go off with him. There's some damned trickery about it. But I've got the whip-hand, my lady. Just look at this before you go."

Lady Edna turned ghastly white and clutched Baltazar's arm to steady herself from the sickening shock. In the desperate rush, after Godfrey's departure, the scheming, the packing, the telephoning, the temporary straightening of affairs, the chase over London for the

complaisant friend whose connivance was essential, the eagerness to get free of the house before her husband should return, she had forgotten the scrap of paper in her secret drawer, with its obsolete information. Now the horror flashed on her. Her husband had gone to the drawer before. Hence the article in Fordyce's paper. Her first instinct had been right. He had gone to the drawer again. Her swaying brain wondered how he had discovered the secret of the spring. But he had found the paper which in her folly she had not destroyed—and what else besides? She heard, as in a dream, her husband saying:

"If he isn't your lover, what about these? Here's proof. Here's a matter of court-martial and gaol."

She regained her self-control with a great effort, still holding to Baltazar.

"You hound!" she whispered.

Baltazar, smitten with the realization that comedy had vanished—the comedy in which he had played so debonair and masterly a part—vanished in the flash of a cinematographic film, and that something very near tragedy was staring him in the face, stretched out his hand for the papers.

"Let me see."

But Donnithorpe smiled his thin, derisive smile. "No. They're too precious. I'll hold them for you to look at. Keep away."

And there, in the airless glass-roofed railway station, on that hot summer afternoon, in the midst of the reverberating noises of trains letting off steam, of a thousand human voices, of scurrying feet, of grating luggage trunks, in the midst of a small town's moving and lounging population, surging now, at that hour's height of the suburban traffic with home-going streams; there, with hundreds of eyes to watch them, hundreds

of ears to hear them, hundreds of successive ears of people darting bee-like around the busy bookstall not ten yards away, there three quietly talking human beings stood at grips with destiny.

"This is written on your note-paper. It is a War Office secret. It reveals the whole strategy of the High Command."

Baltazar's lips grew grim and his eyes, bent on the little man, burned like fires. In Donnithorpe's hands the document was Godfrey's death-warrant.

Then Baltazar remembered the shock he had received in Sheepshanks's room at Cambridge when first he saw a letter of Godfrey's, and Godfrey's after explanation of the identity of their handwriting.

"Don't you see? It gives the whole thing away," Donnithorpe continued.

"I'm quite aware of it," said Baltazar. "I drew it up for your wife."

"You?" exclaimed Donnithorpe in incredulous amazement, while Lady Edna caught a sharp breath and clung more fiercely to Baltazar's arm. "Where did you get your information from?"

"I am to be Minister of the new department in a day or two," said Baltazar, "and I'm in the inner confidence of the War Cabinet."

"But it's in your son's handwriting!"

"It's my handwriting," said Baltazar calmly.

He drew from his pocket a sheaf of notes for a speech and handed them to Donnithorpe. "Compare, if you like."

Donnithorpe returned them with a curious thin snarl and held out the other paper.

"Then you wrote this too?"

Baltazar glanced at it. It was the first sheet of a letter from which the other sheets had been torn. Lady

Edna saw it and again swayed, half fainting with sickening humiliation. The only one of Godfrey's letters—and only part of one—which she had kept : two pages breathing such a passionate love as she had never dreamed that a man in real life could express to woman. She had forgotten that she had left that, too, in the secret drawer. She stared haggardly into Baltazar's face. His lips twisted into a smile.

"Yes. I wrote that too," said he.

"Then you're a damned villain!" cried Donnithorpe.

"Very possibly," said Baltazar.

Donnithorpe turned in his rat-like way to his wife.

"What have you to say about it?"

Suddenly recovered from her fit of terror and shame, she withdrew her grip from Baltazar's arm and held herself up with the scornful poise of her head.

"Nothing," she said. "You can flatter yourself now you know everything."

He did not heed her words, but once more looked from one to the other with a thin, chuckling laugh.

"You're a pretty pair. You, my lady. And you, Mr. Minister of Publicity. It strikes me you'll have to postpone your elopement."

"You've got elopement on the brain, my good fellow," said Baltazar. "A Minister of Publicity doesn't elope with a lady with nothing but what he stands up in. Where's my luggage?"

"There," replied Donnithorpe, pointing to the barriers to the platform. "Didn't the porter say she had ordered two seats—one for a gentleman?"

"This is getting wearisome," said Lady Edna. "I've already told you how the mistake arose."

The solicitous porter, already rewarded with five shillings, and belonging to a race as richly endowed with

human failings as any other in the world, hurried up.

"I've found a corner seat, ma'am. Put everything into the carriage. You've not much time left."

Suddenly she became aware of the awful desolation that awaited her in the remote cottage in the New Forest with one horrible old servant woman for company. Within her feminine unreason clamoured. No, no! She revolted against the grotesque absurdity of such comfortless living burial. She would go mad, cut off from every opportunity of hearing instant developments of this nerve-racking situation. She couldn't stick it.

"I've changed my mind, porter. I'm not going. Get my things out and bring them back."

"Certainly, ma'am."

The porter ran off. Baltazar thrust his hands again into his trousers pockets. His face was a grim mask.

"Why don't you get your luggage out too?" sneered Donnithorpe.

"Don't be a brainless fool," said Baltazar.

The fingers in his pockets twitched, and Lady Edna caught a malevolent flash in his eyes that made her shiver. He would have liked to wring her neck. Why the devil didn't she play the game and go to the cottage and the old woman? He read her through and through. And mingled with his contempt ran a thrill of gladness. Godfrey was well rid of her.

Donnithorpe cackled at his abjuration. He turned to Lady Edna.

"You haven't condescended to tell me where you were going."

"I was going, if you want to know, to stay with Sybil Manning at her little place in the New Forest.

"Indeed?" said her husband, in his rasping voice, and a gleam of triumph sparkled in his crafty eyes.

"Now it happens that I, not being quite the fool you and Mr. Baltazar have thought me, rang up Lady Manning. It was the first thing I did when I read your letter. I knew you would bolt straight to her. I've often thought of bringing in a Bill in Parliament to deprive her of existence. She answered me herself. She had heard nothing of you, knew nothing of you."

"Naturally," she said jeeringly. "But," she added, carrying the war into enemy's quarters, "she knows everything about you. Everything, my friend. So will the Prime Minister."

"I was with the Prime Minister this morning," said Donnithorpe. "I told him all about my Saturday evening's effort in the cause of solidarity. We parted the best of friends, and my position is secure."

"What about Fordyce's article this morning?"

"This morning I couldn't conceive how the fellow had got the information. This evening or to-morrow morning"—he tapped his breast pocket—"if I am asked, I can point to a dual source of leakage."

He folded his arms, the crafty political intriguer, thin and triumphant.

"Of us two," said Baltazar, "it strikes me that you are the damneder scoundrel."

"What you think is a matter of perfect indifference to me," retorted Donnithorpe. "What does interest me is the fact that my wife was going to stay with Lady Manning in the New Forest while Lady Manning is in London, and that when I find her here with you, she decides not to go to the New Forest after all."

Lady Edna flushed angrily. She was out-manœuvred, out-classed, beaten on all sides by the thin grey man whom she despised. She had acted like a brainless, immoral schoolgirl.

"Where do you propose to go now?" asked Donnithorpe.

She spat her venom at him. "Anywhere to get out of the sight of you. Yes, I was going alone to Sybil Manning's cottage. I had just left her when you telephoned. I wanted to get as far away from you as I could and from the disgusting impressions of the last few days. Now the whole thing would be spoiled by this abominable insult. I shall stay with my mother to-night and go down to Moulsford to-morrow."

"I'm glad," replied Donnithorpe acidly, "you're not thinking of returning to my house. I'm not going to have any plea of condonation."

Lady Edna moved away haughtily towards the barriers.

"I see my porter. Mr. Baltazar, will you kindly put me into a taxi?"

"No, he shan't. You shall go in my car."

Baltazar, in a cold fury, stood over him threateningly.

"You stay here," said he, "or by the living God I'll half kill you!"

He caught up Lady Edna and followed with her in the wake of the porter.

She said: "I owe you a debt of gratitude which I can't ever repay."

He felt merciless towards her, murderous. "You let that boy alone, do you hear? You've come within a hair's-breadth of blasting his life. It remains yet to be seen whether that hair's-breadth will save him——"

"I'd do anything in my power——" she began.

"For God's sake stop doing things. Hold your tongue. You've been criminal in your piling folly on folly. You've done enough."

"But you——?"

" I can take care of myself—and the boy, if you keep quiet. You've got to remember the position. I'm your lover. Avowed before your husband by both of us—you implicitly. You're not to lose sight of that fact. Understand ? If you hold any communication with Godfrey, you'll get him court-martialled. Disgraced, probably imprisoned. And then, by God ! I won't have any pity on you."

Talking thus they reached the outer platform of the station and waited while the porter secured a taxi. She whispered, for they were brushed by the throng of passengers arriving and departing :

" If Edgar brings a divorce action—— ? He's vindictive——"

" He'll bring no action, if you stop playing the fool. I'd advise you not to interfere with my game."

The porter swung from the step of the taxi bringing a new arrival, and as soon as the latter, a young officer with a suit-case, had alighted and paid his fare, he piled in Lady Edna's belongings. She entered the cab very white and scared. Godfrey had told her enough about his father for her to realize the unyielding nature of the man. She was terrified, cowed. He blazed before her irresistibly elemental. . . . She carried away with her a blurred impression of his thatch of brown hair coarse and strong like the crown of some relentless beast as he lifted his hat when the taxi drove off. She shuddered, and hated him.

Baltazar let himself into the house in Sussex Gardens, and went straight to Godfrey's room. He found him writing hard. When the young man sprang up, his quiet eye noted the desk strewn with many sheets of note-paper.

" Writing to her, I suppose."

"It's not altogether unnatural," Godfrey replied in stiff hostility.

"Where are you going to address it?"

Godfrey, looking into the infernal eyes, saw that it was not an idle and impertinent question. Besides, he had spent a very agitated hour, gnawed by bitter disappointment and impotent anger and torturing his brain with conjecture as to what had happened.

"Where is Lady Edna, sir?" he asked.

"She has gone to stay with Lady Dunstable."

"Her mother?"

"The Countess of Dunstable is, I believe, her mother," said Baltazar.

He threw himself into a chair and mopped his forehead.

"Why the devil don't you open a window?"

"I didn't notice," said Godfrey, and went and threw up the sash.

It was a cosy room at the back of the house, the smoking den of the late dead owner, furnished with green leather arm-chairs drawn up at each end of a green leather-covered fender-seat, with a great green leather-cushioned Chesterfield, with solid comfortable mahogany tables, writing-desk and bookcases. On the walls hung well-framed old engravings of solid worth, and Godfrey had added a little armoury of war trophies, Hun helmets, rifles, flare pistols, gas-masks, bayonets, gleaming shell-cases of all sizes, a framed blood-stained letter or two in German script. A cosy room, more suitable for a winter's evening than a close summer afternoon. Baltazar filled his lungs with the fresher air.

"That's better," said he.

Godfrey stood by the fireplace, his face set and unyielding.

"Perhaps you might tell me, sir, what has happened. What brought Donnithorpe to the station?"

"The hope of catching you, my son, *in flagrante delicto* of elopement."

"Quong Ho was sure that he wanted you."

"Quong Ho made a mistake. Donnithorpe was exceedingly surprised to find me."

There was a long pause, during which Baltazar bent his disconcerting and luminous gaze on the young man.

"Godfrey," he said at last, "what made you such an infatuated fool as to give away War Office secrets in writing to that woman?"

A look of horror dawned in the young man's eyes and he took a step forward. He gasped:

"What do you mean?"

And then, when Baltazar described the disastrous paper, he cried passionately:

"It can't be! It can't possibly be! Only this morning she told me she had destroyed it."

"She lied, my son," said Baltazar.

"But she knew it was my honour, my everything——"

"Of course she did. Do you suppose that matters to her?"

Godfrey repeated in a dazed way: "There must be some mistake. She told me she had destroyed it."

"Well, she didn't," said Baltazar. "She kept it—to gratify some vanity or ambition. I don't know. Our talk was too concentrated to divagate into motives. Anyway, care for your honour didn't affect her. She left it about, and Edgar Donnithorpe has got it and means to use it."

The distracted young man sat down, his head in his hands, and groaned.

"My God! That's the end of me."

Baltazar deliberately filled and lit a pipe, and said nothing. Better let the consequences of the lady's betrayal soak in. . . . Presently Godfrey rose to his feet and his face was haggard.

"I'll go to Donnithorpe and get it back. He daren't show it. It'll be accusing himself of giving away the information to *The Morning Gazette*."

But Baltazar held him with his inscrutable eyes.

"You're a brilliant soldier, my son, but you're no match for a foxy old politician—a past master of dirty craft. He put himself right with the Prime Minister this morning. Besides, there's the lady to be considered—not that I think she deserves much consideration. Still, it's a convention of honour."

Godfrey flashed: "I'm not going to bring her name into it!"

"He will. He'll get the whole story out of you."

"What am I to do?" asked Godfrey with a helpless gesture.

Baltazar rose. "My boy," said he, "in two or three days' time they're going to make me, a man suddenly sprung from nowhere, a Minister of the Crown. That shows I'm not altogether a silly fool."

In spite of the welter of disillusion and catastrophe in which the boy floundered, he detected in his father's voice the pathetic, apologetic note which he had never been able to resist, the note conveying his father's yearning desire to make good in his eyes.

"You know I'm proud of you, sir," he said. "Which is a lot more," he added with a break in his voice, "than you can say of me."

Baltazar put his arm round his son's shoulders very tenderly.

"My boy," said he, "I'd give my life for you."

And the young man hung his head. "The only thing is, will you trust me?"

Ten minutes afterwards Baltazar, cheery and confident, stood at the door preparing to depart from a chastened though more hopeful Godfrey. Love had conquered. What had passed between his father and the Donnithorpes the boy did not know. Of his father's assumption of the part of indiscreet lover he had no suspicion. But his father had fascinated him, dominated his will, evoked in him a blind, unquestioning confidence, compelled from him a promise of implicit obedience. Of course there were conditions. He was to petition the War Office to be allowed to sacrifice his leave and start for France, at the earliest opportunity, the next day if possible. He was not to communicate with Lady Edna until his return to England, whenever that might be. He gave the latter undertaking readily, her lie rankling in his heart, her callous disregard of his honour monstrous in its incomprehensibility. Whatever might be his revulsion of feeling afterwards—and his clear young brain grappled with the possibility—whatever might be his unregenerate torment of longing, he accepted the condition as his punishment. She, so his father said, was bound by the same condition. . . . Baltazar stood by the door.

"It's all damned hard, old man, I know. But you'll worry through. It's the English way."

He walked out, humming "Tipperary" out of tune, the only modern air he knew, and ascended the stairs and thrust his head into the drawing-room. There, as he expected, he found a desolate Marcelle, who, throwing down the book which she was trying to read, jumped up and ran to the door. What had happened? Quong Ho had told her of Edgar Don-

nithorpe's call. Godfrey was in black anger against her.

"Go down," said he, "and make your peace with him. You'll stay and dine. I must go now and finish my work before dinner."

He left her and, still humming "Tipperary," entered his library, where Quong Ho was patiently and efficiently working at the proofs.

"Miss Baring and Captain Godfrey have upbraided me for indiscretion in that I informed Mr. Donnithorpe of your whereabouts," said Quong Ho.

"The best day's work you ever did in your life," said Baltazar, seating himself at the table and taking up his pen.

The dinner was not quite the success for which Baltazar had hoped, in spite of his efforts to set a tone of light-hearted gaiety. His best champagne flowed to little purpose. Godfrey acknowledged the toast to his promotion and appointment with irreproachable politeness and lamentable lack of fervour. Marcelle confessed afterwards that she had never sat through so unjoyous a meal. To make her peace with Godfrey had been no easy matter. It was but an armistice that she had patched up. Twice that day had he been betrayed by women, and he felt sore against an untrustworthy sex. He had admitted her not an inch further into his confidence. Of the incriminating scrap of paper he told her nothing. She sat at the table puzzled and unhappy. Quong Ho ate philosophically when he was not drinking in the words of wisdom that came from the master's lips.

They broke up early. Godfrey retired to his room. Quong Ho departed to the printers to correct the proof of the editorial. Baltazar walked home with Marcelle: a somewhat silent and miserable little

journey. In vain he assured her that she had been Godfrey's salvation. She only realized that the boy's faith in her had gone. Of the extent of the salvation he, like Godfrey, said nothing. The position for the moment was too delicate and grotesque to be told to another person—even to Marcelle, and his forthrightness scorned half-confidences. He walked back disappointed, ever so little depressed. Hadn't he told everybody to put their trust in him and worry their heads no more about the matter? And they were worrying considerably.

At the end of the passage beyond the hall he saw a streak of light signifying that Godfrey's door was ajar. He went down, opened the door and looked in. There was Godfrey, huddled up on the Chesterfield, his head in his hands, his fingers clutching his crisp fair hair. As he seemed unaware of intrusion, Baltazar closed the door quietly and tiptoed away. No one knew better than he that every man must go through his little Gethsemane alone. But the pity of it! He crept upstairs with an aching heart. Papers by the last post in connection with the new ministry lay on his desk. He sat down and tried to deal with them; but at last abandoned them and sucked a gloomy pipe. Had he saved the boy after all? Would the woman hold her tongue? Was Donnithorpe such a fool as to believe his story? Meanwhile he was the avowed lover of the detested woman and the betrayer of official secrets. And the vindictive little rat held the proofs. What use was he going to make of them?

Yet the situation had a grimly humorous aspect. If he had not seen the boy huddled up in grief and shame downstairs he would have envisaged it with one of his great laughs. . . .

The next day passed quietly. Godfrey was absent

till the evening. He had been to the War Office and arranged to leave for France on the morrow by the staff train. An agreeable evening was marred by no reference to Lady Edna or the scrap of paper. They spoke of books and mathematics and the war and the probable scope of Godfrey's duties.

Only when they shook hands for the night did Godfrey say :

" I think, sir, you're the best father that ever a man had."

And Baltazar, with gladness leaping into his eyes and a grin on his face, replied :

" God knows I try to be."

On the following morning the post brought him a letter from Donnithorpe's solicitors. Would Mr. Baltazar make an appointment to meet Mr. Donnithorpe and themselves, at his earliest convenience, on a matter of very serious importance ? He bade Quong Ho ring up and fix the appointment for three o'clock that afternoon.

" Will you not," hazarded Quong Ho, " be also accompanied by your solicitor ? "

" No," said Baltazar in his grand self-confidence. " Damn lawyers."

When the long train moved out of Charing Cross station amid the waving of handkerchiefs and hats, he drew a breath of unutterable relief. As far as God would allow, the boy was safe. Safe, at any rate, from the woman with whom he had pledged his honour not to communicate while he was in France. And the boy would keep his word. He had been disentangled from the imbroglio. It was all that mattered. He made his powerful, almost ruthless way through the sobered crowd of lately cheerful friends seeing off those dear to them, almost heedless of the streaming eyes of

women who but a moment ago had been so brave and smiling. He was unique among them. His son was not seeking, but escaping death.

Jubilant he walked across the station yard, up Cockspur Street and Pall Mall. He felt strong—nay, more—all-powerful. A force before which all the rats of Donnithorpes and lawyers in the world must crumble. He had no plan; no idea how he should counter Donnithorpe's machinations. He had been accustomed all his life long to wait for the perilous moment and then get in his grip. He had glorious faith in his destiny. His and Godfrey's. The destiny of the House of Baltazar. The war over, Godfrey would find some sweet English girl and marry her; and there would be a son to carry on the torch and hand it, in his turn, to the next generation. Striding up St. James's Street, he saw the babe; made calculations of dates. He would last at least till seventy-five. The grandson then would be on the verge of manhood. . . . He laughed. Odd that he should have lived for fifty years before dreaming of the continuance of his race. Those infernal years in China! He cursed them. Never mind. If he had gone on in the humdrum certainty of the perpetuation of his name he would have missed the present glory of the conception. It was a wonderful world.

He lunched at his club with Weatherley and Burtingshaw, optimistic to gasconade, prophesying the speedy end of the war; then the Millennium; the world ruled by Anglo-Saxon fibre of brain and body inspired by Latin nervous force—the combination towards which civilization had been groping for centuries. At ten minutes to three he waved them farewell and drove in a taxi to his appointment in Bedford Row.

He was shown into a room where Edgar Donnithorpe and an impassive elderly man with a face like a horse awaited him. He felt that he entered like an irresistible force.

CHAPTER XXIV

HE stood, an hour later, on the pavement of that noiseless and forlorn thoroughfare, and stared at the latest catastrophe which, like all the others in his impulsive life, he had of his own deliberate act contrived. As yet he failed fully to understand his defeat—for defeat it was, surrender absolute and unconditional. He thrust his hat to the back of his head and mopped his forehead, and moved slowly up the street in amazed reaction from the glow of conquest which warmed him as he had entered the office. He had gone without any plan of campaign, confident in his intellectual resource to meet emergency. Merciless craft and cunning vindictiveness met him. Under the fierce sunshine, angry shame made him hotter, and the sweat poured down his face. He had been able only to bluster and threaten in vain retaliation. The grey rat of a man had laughed at him with rasping thinness. The horse-faced lawyer had smiled professional deprecation of heroics. "I shall do this and that," he declared. "Then our action will be so and so," they countered. Like the Duke of Wellington, he cried: "Publish and be damned." They pointed out with icy logic that not they but he and his would suffer inevitable condemnation.

"You and yours." That was the lawyer's phrase. On the last word two pairs of eyes were bent on him narrowly and significantly. The unmistakable hint

—the only one during the interview—of Godfrey's complicity, he had repudiated with indignation. The consequences concerned himself alone. They smiled again. "Let it be so, then," said they, "for the sake of argument. . . ." As he walked along the burning street he wondered how much they knew, how much they guessed. Save for that significant glance, both the grey politician and the long-lipped lawyer had been as inscrutable as Buddhist idols. And he, John Baltazar, had been hopelessly outmatched.

Yet, after all, at a cost, he had won the game. Godfrey was saved. Mechanically he put his hand to the breast pocket of his thin summer jacket and felt the incriminating document crackle beneath his touch. That and the sheet of clotted passion of which he had confessed himself the author. . . . He continued his way westwards, down the mean and noisy Theobald's Road, half conscious of his surroundings. The drab men and women who jostled him on the pavement and passed him in the roadway traffic seemed the happy creatures of a dream—happy in the inalienable possession of their London heritage. . . . Fragments of the recent interview passed through his mind. His adversaries had threatened not to stand alone on the written disclosure of War Office secrets. They could bring evidence of leakage through Lady Edna, for some time past, of important military information. He could quite believe it. The written paper could scarcely be the boy's sole infatuated indiscretion ; and as for the lady—revealed as she was yesterday, he counted her capable of any betrayal. Bluff or not, he had yielded to the threat. While the paper remained in Donnithorpe's possession, Godfrey was in grave peril. . . . "You and yours." The phrase haunted

him. If he defied them, they would strike through him at Godfrey.

Were they aware of farce? If so, why, save for this veiled allusion, did Godfrey, the real lover, seem to matter so little? During the interview their attitude puzzled him, until he became aware of Donnithorpe's implacable enmity towards him, John Baltazar. And now he wondered whether the pose of the injured husband were not a blind for revenge rooted in deeper motives.

Only a fortnight or so ago Godfrey had said:

"The little beast hates you like poison."

He had asked why. Parrot-like, Godfrey had quoted from Lady Edna's report of the conversation before his father's visit to Moulsford.

"A Triton like you gives these political minnows the jumps."

He had laughed at affectionate exaggeration. But was the boy right after all? Certainly he had paid scant courtesy to Donnithorpe, whom he had lustily despised as one of the brood of little folk still parasitically feeding on the Empire which they had done their best to bring to ruin. Was this the abominable little insect's vengeance?

He halted at the hurrying estuary of Hart Street, Bloomsbury, took off his hat, and again mopped his forehead and the short thatch of thick brown hair. The words of Dr. Rewsby of Water-End flashed across his mind—"Have you generally conducted your life on these extravagant principles?" . . . and . . . "I should say you were cultivating a very bad habit, and I should advise you to give it up." And he remembered his confession, a year ago, to the sagacious doctor: "You have the most comforting way in the world of telling me that I'm the Great Ass of the Universe."

"That man's diagnosis," said Baltazar to himself, putting on his hat, "was perfectly correct. I am."

He marched in his unconsciously hectoring way down Holborn and Oxford Street, deep in his thoughts. Yes, once again his episodical life history had repeated itself. The same old extravagant principles had once again prevailed. They were part and parcel of his being, resistless as destiny. Once again, without thought of the future, he had cast the glowing present to the winds. Once again he had proved himself the Great Ass of the Universe. But what did it matter? Godfrey was saved. Again he made the papers crackle in his pocket. He had told him he would give his life for him. He strode along fiercely. By God! Stupendous Ass that he might be, he had never in his life broken a vow or a promise. . . . Apart from the passionate love he had conceived for the boy, there was no reparation adequate for his twenty years' unconscious neglect. He swung his stick to the peril of the King's lieges on the pavement. It was a young man's world—this new world that was to follow the war. Old men like himself were of brief account. Godfrey should have his chance, unstained, unfettered in the new world which his generation, throwing mildewed tradition on a universal bonfire, would have to mould.

He drew nearer to the brighter life of West End London, Oxford Circus, with its proud sweep of great shops and its plentiful harbours from the streams of the four great thoroughfares. Reluctant to confine himself yet awhile within the four walls of his library, he abandoned the straight course home and went down Regent Street, and at last stood uncertain at Piccadilly Circus, the centre of London, more than any other

one spot perhaps, the true heart of the Empire. Though it was the broad day of a summer afternoon, his memory sped swiftly back over twenty years to the night when he saw it alive with light and flashing movement and the great city's joy of life, for the last time before he sailed for China ; when, in spite of decorous and scholarly living, his heart had sunk within him at the realization that he was giving up all that, and all that it symbolized—the familiar and pulsating life of England. And now he stood in the same glamour-haunted precincts, and again his heart sank like a stone. He turned, crept for a few steps down Piccadilly, and, catching a taxi putting down a fare at the Piccadilly Hotel, engaged it and drove home to Sussex Gardens.

The house appeared bleak and desolate. Quong Ho had gone some whither. Godfrey—he thanked God —was on his way to France. Foolishly he had hoped that Marcelle might be awaiting him, to hear the latest tidings of the boy ; but she was not there. For all its carpeting and pleasant luxury of furniture the house seemed to be full of echoes, as though it were an empty shell. For the first time in his life he shrank, almost afraid, from the intolerable loneliness of the lot to which he had condemned himself. For the last year he had given way to his long-pent-up craving for human affection. He had cast his soul into the orgy of love that he had compelled from the only three dear to him in the world. It had been more than his daily bread. It had been a kind of daily debauch. It had lifted him above himself. Marcelle loved him, Godfrey loved him, Quong Ho loved him, each in their separate ways. They were always there, ready at hand, to appease the hunger of the moment. And now, in a flash, he had cut himself adrift from the beloved three. The love would remain. That he

knew. But from the precious food of its daily manifestations he would be many thousands of leagues sundered by oceans and continents. At thirty he could forsake love and face solitude with the brave fool's confidence. At fifty he gazed terrified at the prospect. He had embraced loneliness as a bride, three years ago, in order to save himself from perdition. But then his heart had been stone-cold, unwarmed by any human touch. He had felt himself to be an unwanted wanderer in an alien planet. Spendale Farm had been a haven of comfort, an Eden of refuge. But the German bomb had revolutionized his world. It had magically brought him into indissoluble bondage to human things of unutterable dearness. And now once more—*finis* to the episode which he had thought to be the story ending only in death.

He sat mechanically at the writing-table in his library and began to open the letters that had come during his absence. A leathern Government despatch case containing the day's papers from the office which he had only hurriedly visited that morning awaited his attention. The deathly sensation that they no longer concerned him held him in a cold grip. There was a flaming article from a Croatian statesman which had reached *The New Universe* through devious channels, fraught with pregnant information. He glanced through it in impotent detachment, like that of a dead man brought back to the conduct of his affairs. He was no longer the dynamo of *The New Universe*. Other forces, who and what he knew not, would in a day or two take his place. *The New Universe* would have to get on, as best it could, without him. He was dead. He had no more to do with *The New Universe* than with the internal affairs of Mars.

He opened an envelope addressed in a well-known handwriting and franked with distinguished initials. It had been delivered by messenger. Like a dead man he read the achievement of his ambition. He was a Minister of the Crown. The public announcement awaited only his formal acceptance. He stared dully at the idle words. And then suddenly mad rage against the derisive irony of his destiny shook him and he sprang from his chair, and, in the unsympathetic privacy of the room which he had not furnished, he stormed in foolish fury and vain agony of soul. . . .

It was the end of John Baltazar—the John Baltazar in whom he had always believed, at the moment of proof positive of the justification of his faith. To Godfrey he had not boasted unduly A year ago he had awakened, a new Rip Van Winkle, to a world for two years at war. In a few months, God knows how, save through his resistless energy, his new-born and flaming patriotism and his keen brain, he had established himself in England as a driving force compelling recognition and application to the country's needs. He had won his position by sheer strength of personality. Transcendental mathematics and Chinese scholarship he had thrown into the dust-heap of broken toys. He had emerged from philosophic childhood into the active life of a man, with his strong hands fingering the strings of the world's war. Now the strings were in his grasp. . . . He had looked far ahead. This Ministry, though of vast importance, was yet subordinate to the Greater Powers of the State. He was young. What was fifty-one? The infancy stage of statesmanship. Why should not he, John Baltazar, rise to higher power and guide the civilized world to victory and to triumphant peace?

The man had dreamed many dreams. What great man does not? Never yet has the human being whose day's vision is blackened by the curtain of the night reached the shadow of achievement. Then again: was it of England or of John Baltazar that he dreamed? Who can tell? Can any man of noble ambitions, of deep conviction of his own powers, strip himself naked before his God and tell?

And now the dreams were but dreams. Blankness confronted him. Raving against fate brought no consolation or relief. In utter dejection he threw himself into an arm-chair and once more gazed hopelessly at catastrophe.

There was no longer a John Baltazar. As far as England was concerned he had ceased to exist. In that lawyer's office he had signed his abdication. There was the letter written and addressed, formally declining the almost hourly expected offer of the ministerial appointment. The offer had now come. He had pledged his honour to give immediate signal for the posting of the answer. That was part of the price demanded for the surrender of the disastrous documents. He went to the telephone and curtly carried out those terms of his contract.

There remained the other condition to be fulfilled, for which they had no other guarantee than his word. There at least—and a gleam of pride irradiated his gloom—he had triumphed. He had compelled them to trust his word without a scrap of written obligation. He would sail for China within a month.

He sat there alone in the silent house, wondering again whether he had not set the final seal on himself as the Great Ass of the Universe. He had been driven, it is true, into a corner by the malignity and craft of his opponents; but it was he himself who had

dictated the terms of surrender. Acting on one of the wild impulses that had deflected from childhood the currents of his life, he had made the amazing proposal.

It was the end of John Baltazar. He rose, went over to his table and filled his pipe. Anyhow, the House of Baltazar stood firm in honour. He would yet dandle the grandson on his knee. *La course du flambeau* was the beginning and end of human endeavour. The torch was in Godfrey's hands now. . . . Feeling for his match-box, his wrist met the hidden papers in his jacket pocket which he had almost forgotten. He drew them out, folded the one fraught with court-martial and disgrace to Godfrey into a long strip and set fire to it, a torch not to be handed on. He lit his pipe with it instead and watched it burn till the flame touched his finger-tips. Then he went over to the grate and burned the love-letter.

He sat down and wrote to Godfrey.

"My dear Boy,

"I think you ought to know that I have been as good as my word. Three hours after parting from you, I recovered possession of the document, and this time you may be certain that it no longer exists, for I have myself destroyed it. Your sheet now is clean in this respect, and also in others, if the barrage of silence is maintained.

"I cannot possibly tell you how I shall miss you.

"Your ever affectionate father,

"John Baltazar."

That was all. Time enough to tell him about China when he had made definite arrangements for the voyage. He prayed anxiously that he might make the

announcement in such a way that Godfrey should never self-reproachfully suspect the cause of his exile.

Quong Ho, returning a short while afterwards, found him deeply engaged with the contents of the despatch-case.

CHAPTER XXV

AS he had expected, the Foreign Office beamed on him. It was immensely gratified that a man of his statesmanlike qualities should have differentiated so acutely between the values of the two spheres of his suggested activities. In bureaucratic satisfaction it rubbed its hands at a departmental score. Mr. Baltazar had only to name his terms and conditions. With the Foreign Office it was all plain sailing. Nay, more. If it could have prevailed with an ultra-conservative Admiralty, it would have sent him out to China in the newest, fastest and most mysterious battle-cruiser. But in Government circles outside the Foreign Office there was the devil to pay. Consternation also reigned in the office of *The New Universe*. For two or three weeks Baltazar had a grim time.

The first announcement in an evening newspaper of his retirement from the projected Ministry smote the eyes of an incredulous and bewildered Marcelle. She caught him on the telephone.

"Is it true?"

"Yes. Quite true."

"But I don't understand."

"I'll come round this evening and explain."

"No. I'll come to you. I shan't be alone here."

"Come to dinner."

"Miss Graham and I are just sitting down to ours. I'll run round after."

"All right. I'm free all the evening."

Baltazar dined alone with Quong Ho, and talked cheerfully of matters far remote from the war. No reference was made to his retirement from English politics, about which Quong Ho knew everything, or to the Chinese Mission, of which Quong Ho as yet had no official knowledge. Apart from the expressed desire of the Foreign Office to keep the appointment from the Press, it was characteristic of Baltazar to maintain silence, even to those dear to him, as to his especially meteoric doings. Besides, of the two, Marcelle must have the privilege of being the first to learn from his own lips.

She arrived about half-past eight, and he received her in the drawing-room. She wore a simple, semi-evening old black dress into which she had changed before her quiet dinner with her friend, a long pre-war confection, a favourite of Godfrey's, moulding her, as he said, in soldierly daring, like Juno. Her thick brown hair crowned her gloriously. Rest had restored her to health, and in spite of the anxiety in her eyes, she appeared to Baltazar in the ripe fulness of her beauty. He strode to meet her, with his usual gesture of outstretched hands, strong, confident, admiring, smiling. Yet never did she appear more desirable, or more remote from his desires.

"What is the meaning of it—your resignation? I thought it was the one thing in life you were working for."

"I find," said he, "I can serve my country better in other ways."

She put a hand to a puzzled forehead.

"How?"

He looked steadily into her eyes. What was the use of beating the air with idle words? She would have to know the truth sooner or later.

"By going to China."

She stared at him open-mouthed.

"China?"

"Why not?"

He stood, his hands deep in his dinner-jacket pockets, balancing himself alternately on toes and heels, with the air of a conqueror.

"I know more about inner China, I suppose, than any man living. I go out with a free hand to pull two or three hundred million people together and establish a wise government and exterminate the German. Hundreds of men can do my job in England. But those who can do it in China may be counted on the fingers of a mutilated hand."

"It's all so sudden."

"I'm a sudden sort of fellow, as you ought to know," he laughed.

"But you always said you hated the place—would rather die than go back."

"In these days you've got to do things you hate—for the good of your country."

She sat down, feeling stupefied by his news. She asked:

"How long will you be away?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly years. Who knows?"

"And when do you start?"

"As soon as I can wind up here. Say in a fortnight's time." She shook her head and looked at the floor, making little hopeless gestures with her fingers. "You see, my dear," said he, "except my own personal ambitions, which I have scrapped for the time, there's nothing very much to keep me here. I've done my duty by Quong Ho. He's on the road to fame at Cambridge. Godfrey's settled in France

till the end of the war. And you—well, my dear," he smiled, "we won't lose touch with each other for another twenty years."

"No, of course not," she said in a queer voice. "We'll—we'll write to each other." She raised her eyes to his timidly. "Won't you be rather lonely out there, without us?"

He turned swiftly aside so that she should not see his face. "Naturally I'll miss you. Miss the three of you. I'm human. But, on the other hand, I'm used to being alone. I'm a solitary by temperament." Then he flashed round on her. "Don't you worry about me. I'll have my hands too full to be lonely. I'll have a real man's job to get through."

In his vehement way he sketched the kind of work that lay before him, went off into picturesque reminiscence, unfolded some of the plans he had already made for the conquest of those in power in disaffected districts. Anyone but Marcelle he would have convinced of the whole-hearted and enthusiastic anticipation of his mission. But a woman whom a man loves is apt to know him even better than the woman who loves him. A suspicion, vague but insistent, began to haunt her. Presently she gave words to it.

"Have Godfrey's affairs anything to do with this sudden decision of yours?"

He assumed a puzzled look. "Godfrey's affairs?"

"Yes. The Donnithorpe business."

He laughed. "My dear, we're dealing in high international politics. What on earth can a boy's calf-love have to do with it?"

"You've never told me what happened at Waterloo. Nor did Godfrey."

"I simply pulled them apart. Sent Lady Edna

home, and despatched Godfrey to France a day before his time. That's all over."

"But you met Mr. Donnithorpe. Quong Ho——"

"Oh, yes, I met Donnithorpe. That's what saved the situation. He expected to find Godfrey. Found me instead." He grinned in the most disarming manner. "A comedy situation. And off he went defeated." He took her hand, apparently in the gayest of moods. "It's only a woman," said he, "that could throw a bridge between Waterloo station and the interior of China."

She let the question drop; but the suspicion remained, and every minute that passed, until the ormolu clock on the drawing-room mantelpiece gave her the signal for conventional retirement, converted it into certainty.

He walked with her as usual to the door of her block of flats. On parting she found tremulous utterance for the sense of utter forlornness which she had been trying all the evening to formulate:

"What's to become of me when you're gone?"

She fled upstairs, not waiting for the lift, and went straight to her room, with the words echoing in her ears. No. They did not at all convey her heart's meaning. They sounded heartless, selfish. Yet they were true. What would become of her? For a year she had been enwrapped soul and mind and thought in the dynamic man. Dynamic yet so tender, so chivalrous, so childlike. Without him existence was a blank full of shuddering fears. And then a coldness as of death fell upon her. Never once, on this night of the parting of the ways, had he hinted at his love for her. Had she, by her selfish folly, her now incomprehensible sex shrinkings, killed at last the love that once was hers for the taking? Slowly she undressed and

crept into bed ; but sleep mocked her. Agonizingly awake, she stared at her life. . . . And she stared too, almost in rhythmic alternation, at the life of John Baltazar. Nothing but some supreme emotional crisis could have caused this characteristic revolution, this sudden surrender of the prize of his ambition, this gorgeous acceptance of exile. For all his contemptuous dismissal of the suggestion, she knew, with a woman's unerring logic, that Baltazar had bought Godfrey's release from entanglement at the price of his own career. And never a hint of regret, never a murmur against fate. Never the faintest appeal to pity. . . . And she arraigned her own narrow nurse's self, and condemned it mercilessly. And the lower she sank in her own esteem, the higher rose Baltazar until he loomed gigantic as a god above her puny mortality.

Her throat was dry. She got out of bed and drank a glass of water. On her way back across the room her glance fell on the little brass Yale latchkey, lying on her dressing-table, which he, in his big, careless way, had insisted on her having, so that she could gain entrance, as of right, to the house, whenever she chose. She took it up, gazing at it stupidly. The key to his home, the key to his heart, the key to his soul—all in her keeping. And she had despised it. Now she had lost it. The home would pass into alien hands. His heart was barred. For the first time, for a whole year, they had met without his uttering one little word, playful or wistful or tyrannic, to prove that his nature was open hungrily for her. To-night she had been but his dear friend. He had accepted her gift of friendship. She remembered the old French adage : *L'amitié, c'est le tombeau de l'amour.* She sat on the edge of the bed and mourned hopelessly the death of his love.

And the brass Yale latchkey lay mockingly within her range of vision.

Baltazar walked home, her last words echoing in his ears. His absence in China would naturally make a difference to her. She had become part of his household. Godfrey, to whom she had given a mother's heart, was indefinitely in France and alienated from her by his resentment of her breach of confidence. She had identified herself so unreservedly with the fortunes of the House of Baltazar that now, cut adrift, she would be on the high seas, derelict. What could he do to mitigate her loneliness? If he died, she would be well provided for. He had made his will some months ago. But he had every hope of living for many robust years. What indeed would become of the beloved woman now that their new attachments to life were broken? The nurse's career, in which she had spent the splendid energies of her young womanhood? If Godfrey were in London, he could commend her, with authority, to his care. But Godfrey's vanishing to France was the essence of the whole business. There remained only Quong Ho. His appreciation of the comic put Quong Ho out of court.

He entered his house in Sussex Gardens remorseful for lack of consideration for Marcelle. But, hang it all, one couldn't think of everything at once. If she had cared enough for him to marry him, well—there would have been the Light that never was on Sea or Land. He would have snapped his fingers at the doings of the little planet Earth. He would have been Master of the Universe. But that was not to be. Either all in all as a wife or not at all. An irrevocable decision. It was not Marcelle's fault that she did not love him in that way. . . . No use thinking of it.

It was all over. They had drifted, however, into an exquisite companionship, as exquisite to her—he had no false modesty about it—as to him. And now that was over. What was to become of Marcelle?

He was filling his pipe when Quong Ho entered the library with his little deferential bow.

"Sir," said he, "may I be allowed to commit an indiscretion?"

"You'll do it so discreetly," said Baltazar, "that it won't matter. Fire ahead."

"In the event of your leaving this country on a mission to the Far East——"

"What the devil do you know about it?" asked Baltazar.

"In high Chinese circles in London it is common knowledge," replied Quong Ho.

"Together with lots of other things concerning me, I suppose."

"You have many times observed," said Quong Ho, "that my countrymen are afflicted with an abnormal thirst for unessential information."

In spite of his heavy-heartedness, Baltazar smiled grimly.

"Well, suppose I am going to China. What of it?"

"May I postpone Cambridge degree and Fellowship for several years and accompany you?"

Baltazar's brow grew black. "Isn't England good enough for you?"

Quong Ho broke into florid Chinese, the only vehicle for his emotion. England was the land of his dreams. But why should he lie beneath the passion-flower of luxury while his master ate the bread of exile? Surely his degraded unworthiness might be useful to his illustrious Excellency as confidential

secretary not unversed, thanks to his honoured master and patron, in the language and scholarship of the Mandarins. Or, if that was deemed too honourable a position, his filial piety ordained that he should offer himself as slave or any debased instrument for which use could be found.

"Oh, for God's sake talk English!" cried Baltazar, his nerves on edge, foreseeing such endless verbiage in similar perfect phrasing that awaited him in China.

Quong Ho spread out his hands and his face grew impassive. "I have spoken," he replied simply.

"I don't want any more careers upset," said Baltazar irritably. "You're fixed. You've to get your Fellowship. You'll stay in England. Besides, I need you here to look after Miss Baring's interests."

"I confess," said Quong Ho gravely, "to being oblivious of that side of the question."

Baltazar, lying deep in his arm-chair, pipe in mouth, gazed intently into the oblique steadfast eyes of the son of his quaint adoption. The idea of leaving Marcelle under his protection did not seem in the least comic. He passed an impatient hand over his brow. Was he losing his sense of values?

Apart from his intellectual gifts, Quong Ho was a man of shrewd common sense and of infinite trustworthiness. Marcelle knew this. Unlike so many untravelled Englishwomen, she did not regard a Chinaman as a sort of dangerous toy dog. She shared his faith in Quong Ho.

"I thank you for your offer, my dear fellow," he said at last, repenting his ungraciousness. "I know you made it out of affection for me. I deeply appreciate it. If it weren't for Miss Baring, I wouldn't hesitate. As it is, I leave you here as my agent."

Quong Ho bowed. "So long as I can be of service to you, sir, your word is law," said he, and retired.

Baltazar, left alone, resumed his uninspired reflections. He felt physically and morally weary, a beaten man. He shrank from his Chinese exile with pathetic dread ; shrank from the toilsome journeys, the eternal compliments of convention that delayed serious discussion, the perpetual ceremonial, the futile tea-drinking, the mass of tradition and prejudice and ignorance, the smiling craft that used it as a buffer against enlightenment. He looked with dismay on his exclusion from the keen intellectual talk in which he had revelled for the past year, from the brain-thrilling battle of Western Thought. It was a man's work, his mission ; a picked man's work. Hundreds would have regarded it as a climax of their diplomatic ambition. But to him, who had thrown himself into vast schemes for the reconstruction of the war-torn world, it was exile, defeat. It was not in his nature to regret his sacrifice. What was done was done. The stars in their courses had fought against him individually, even though, in their inscrutable wisdom they fought, as he believed, for his House. No man who has saturated himself for years with Chinese thought can escape the spiritual influence of fatalism. He was a fatalist. It was written that he should fail in every one of his great adventures. Yet the fact of it being written made his lot none the less damnable for the very human and vivid man, once more involved in predestined shipwreck.

He smoked many pipes thinking disconnectedly, without method, and feeling old and lonely and broken, and very, very tired. At last his pipe dropped to the floor and he fell asleep.

Suddenly the subconsciousness of a presence in the room caused him to awake with a start. He looked up and, bewildered, saw Marcelle standing by his chair. She was crying. He sprang to his feet, passing his hands over his eyes.

"You here?" His glance instinctively sought the clock on the mantelpiece. "Why, it's half-past two in the morning!"

She said: "I couldn't sleep. I couldn't rest. I had to come."

He did not understand.

"What is the matter, my dearest? What can I do for you?"

"Only go on loving me, and forgive me," she said desperately.

"But I do," he cried, puzzled. "It's just hell for me to leave you. But I can't help it, my dear. My hand has been forced. It's even harder to leave you than it was twenty years ago. I love you and want you more than ever I did in my life."

"So do I," she said, in a shaking voice. "That's why I'm here, at half-past two in the morning."

Baltazar uttered a great triumphant cry and clasped her in his arms.

"By God," said he, "I've won after all!"

He held her at arm's length and looked at her exultantly. Thank Heaven she had no suspicion of his sense of downfall. Not Pity, but Love at last awakened, had brought her to him.

"Yes," he repeated. "I've won after all."

After a while, when he had almost forgotten his words, she asked him:

"What did you think you had lost?"

"My faith in my destiny. The star of Baltazar. Once upon a time the original bearer of my name,

with the others, had faith in a star, and he followed it and found God."

She smiled. "Dear, aren't you talking a bit wildly?"

"What's the good of speech if one can't use it wildly in wild moments?" He laughed. "Oh, you belovedest woman," said he, and kissed her.

Presently: "You'll come out to China with me? You'll progress like a queen. I'll see to that."

"It doesn't matter how I progress," she said, "so long as I'm with you. I'm yours body and soul to the end of time."

"To the end of Eternity," he cried. "I prefer that. It's bigger. The biggest there is is good enough for me."

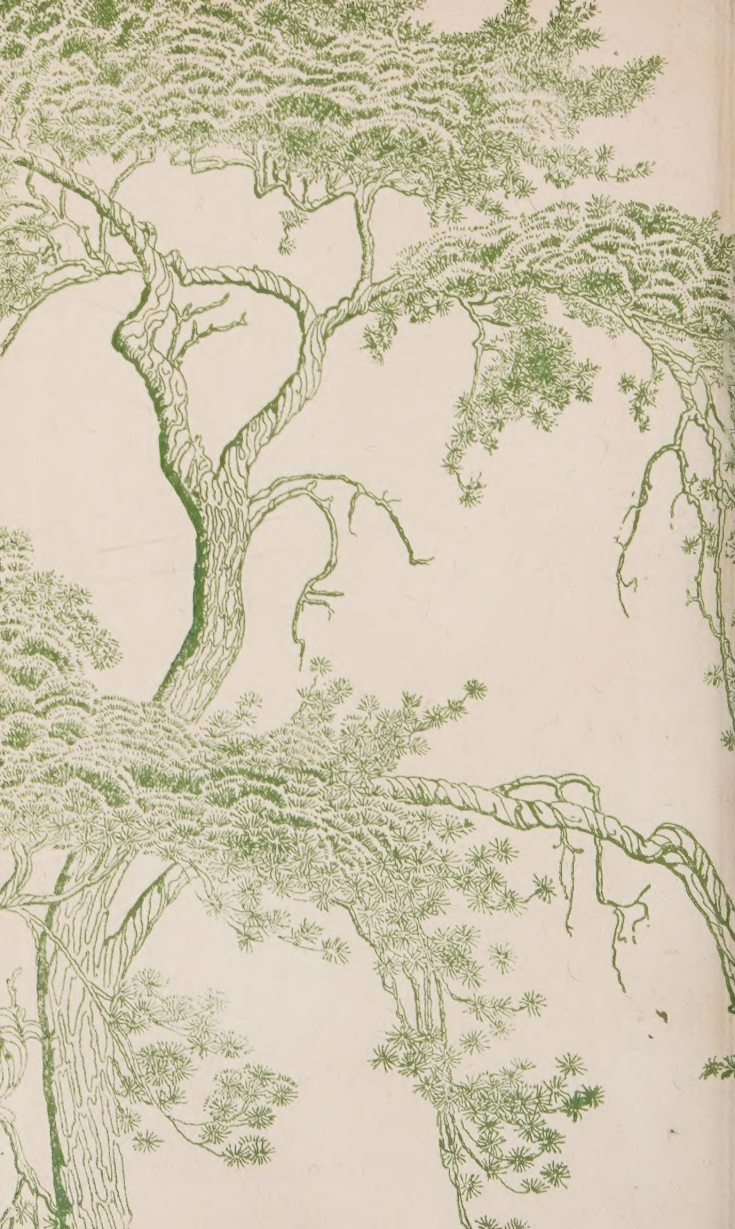
His dancing eyes burned like flames of pride and happiness. Twenty years seemed to have fallen from him, and she saw before her the young man whom as a girl she had loved.

"You and I are going over to the greatest work ever attempted by man. The regeneration of half the continent of Asia. I couldn't have done it alone. The prospect frightened me. Yes, it did. I hadn't the heart. But with you—I stake my faith in the Star—it'll be one of the great accomplishments of the war. Quong Ho will come with us. He'll have his chance. I'll make him one of the great men of the New China."

He went on, expounding his vision of the new order of Oriental things. She marvelled at him, for it seemed as if he had but lived for that moment.

And divining his Great Sacrifice, she forgot the selfless years that had all but moulded her into a mere machine of tender service to maimed and diseased humanity, and felt a thing of small account before this man whose unconquerable faith and indomitable cour-

age transformed his colossal vanities into virtues, and who, for all his egotism, was endowed with the supreme gift of love.

"Godfrey will be astonished at all this," she hazarded.

"Astonishment," said he, "is an emotion salutary for the very young. It stimulates thought."